

Naga rebels challenge CM's writ

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Kohima, Sept. 26: The NSCN (I-M) has stepped into the political limelight, appropriating for itself the role of a government.

With the ban on the Naga outfit no longer in place, it is slowly but surely shedding its "underground" tag. From social vigilantism, it is now overtly trying to step into the Neiphiu Rio ministry's domain.

The chief minister has not taken kindly to the move.

The NSCN (I-M) has directed all private schools in Nagaland to register themselves with it, a step perceived by the government as an "intrusion" into its affairs.

The schools have also been asked to add four more days to their list of holidays by incorporating in the list the "Naga national holidays". These include the outfit's raising day (on January 31). The other three are "agony day — a day of sadness for the nation" on September 27, "Naga republic day" on March 21 and "independence day" on August 14.

The chief minister described the directive as "direct interference" in the government's functioning. "They cannot issue any directive to the schools as this is entirely under the jurisdiction of the state government," he said.

Rio made it clear that his government would not allow itself to be "dictated" by the outfit in this manner.

In a press communiqué, NSCN (I-M) deputy secretary L. Luiyik said the outfit was concerned about the quality of education in private schools. He said the organisation had

been forced to monitor the functioning of such schools. This, he argued, necessitated registration of schools with the organisation.

The outfit also wants the student-teacher ratio in each school to be maintained at 50:1. It further said all teachers should undergo basic training. "Maladministration in the education sector will be checked by the GPRN (Government of the People's Republic of Nagalim)," it declared.

The NSCN (I-M) statement said such steps were necessary to enable students to "grow in the right direction".

It also issued a list of directives to schools on hostel facilities. No private hostel will be allowed to be set up without the outfit's permission.

The NSCN (I-M) even mentioned the size and number of rooms a hostel ought to have and the composition of the teaching staff. "Sixty per cent of the teachers in a school should be local indigenous people." It had recently published advertisements in newspapers seeking applications from local youths for recruitment to its civil and armed wings.

The organisation had long been running a parallel government, but never before directly interfered in the functioning of the state government. It only collected "taxes" from government departments.

Rio appreciated the steps taken by the outfit to eliminate "social menaces" like drug abuse and black marketing of liquor in the dry state. "It is not that we are taking any help from them. Any good step for the welfare of the society, by anyone, is always welcome."

Reality, historicity, issues - I

By BK Roy-Burman

WITH a territorial coverage of 22,327 sq km, Manipur is perceived as a small state, but with its location at the meeting point of South and South-east Asia, and with a long history of its own, strategically it is one of the most important states of India. In the east and the south, Manipur has a common boundary with Myanmar; it shares boundaries with Assam in the west and with Nagaland in the north. The population of Manipur in 2001 was 2.4 million, around 34 per cent of which belongs to the category of Scheduled Tribes.

While only one-tenth of Manipur's territory constitutes the plains surrounded by hills on all sides, as much as two-third of the population lives in the valley and only one-third in the hills. The hills-plains relations are marked by multiple predicaments as well as by the historical imperative of living shared collective lives together.

Nationalities and ethnicities

THE indigenous population of the valley is mainly the Meiteis whose history as a distinct political entity, it is generally accepted, goes back to the first century BC. The 2001 census records the presence of 0.19 million Muslims in the state. This population has been living in the valley in enclaves for around two centuries. The north, the east and the west hills are mostly inhabited by peoples claiming to be Nagas; some of them were described in earlier ethnographic literature as Kuki.

To some extent there is ethnic identity oscillation among the latter. This is related to two factors - ideology of land control, particularly in Manipur hills, and vicissitudes in political power equations in Manipur and Myanmar. The southern hills are almost exclusively inhabited by tribal peoples, broadly categorised as belonging to the Kuki-Mizo constellation. But these people live in enclaves in all districts of the state. While a small number of the Kuki-Mizo population has been inhabiting the southern hills for generations, most of the others migrated to the state during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The peoples of the hills are predominantly Christians of the Baptist denomination, but tribal social organisation is reflected even in the organisational structure and practices of the Church. It is interesting that a number of



Women of Thanga Island, Manipur, shout anti-AFSPA slogans after police dispersed dharmas demanding removal of the AFSPA. — Eastern Projections

Kabuis in Imphal city continue to hold their traditional faith.

It has already been mentioned that while Manipur shares an international border with Myanmar, Imphal valley is encircled by hills - the habitats of the tribal peoples.

Kuki-Mizo militancy is a complex multi-tiered problem and changes focus from time to time. In general, it's not secessionist. In avowed Naga areas, the militancy is primarily related to the Naga secessionist movement in Nagaland.

The militants in the valley draw their legitimacy primarily from perceptions of (a) Manipur being annexed by India through coercion after the departure of the British from the scene (b) Undermining the dignity of Manipur after merger with India (c) Agreement with Myanmar to hand over the Meitei dominated Kabu valley to that country.

Hurt Dignity

MOST Manipuri intelligentsia consider that this hurt the dignity of Manipur. They were more hurt when Nagaland was created as a full-fledged state in 1963, while Manipur remained a C-category state, only to be made a Union Territory. It was only in 1972 that it

in Manipur. Irabot Singh fled to Myanmar from where he carried on his struggle, but died there after some time. Recently available data show at that time, Myanmar being taken over by the Communists was a distinct possibility. If considered in a purely nationalist perspective, ignoring the larger issue of socio-political transformation, this perhaps explains India's high-handedness in forcing the merger and the King's reported vacillation, and also the State Council's failure to protest against the forced merger.

It is however to be noted that short-circuiting democratic process, in the pursuit of the pan-Indian nationalist perspective and later transgressing the human rights of the population in the name of state security through operation of the draconian Armed Force Special Power Act erodes the ethical basis of the existence of the Indian state. There cannot be any state security without human security.

As regards the militants, it is to be clarified that while the bulk of the Manipuri intelligentsia harbours a resentment towards the Indian State's steamroller actions, the overwhelming majority of the people are not secessionists. This is not only because of pragmatic consideration, but also because of awareness of the Indian State's record vis-a-vis the functioning of State as an institution in many democratic countries. However, the record of other countries is no justification for India denying its own heritage.

Further, it is to be noted that among the militants who carry forward the heritage of the revolutionary Irabot Singh of the mid-20th century, at the theoretical level the primacy is not secession but transformation of the polity of India through an alliance of peasants, working class and small nationalities, with the latter playing a vanguard role. The revivalists, however, think more in terms of an independent Manipur, unconcerned that if pressed too hard internal contradictions within the state, some of which have already been indicated, may flare up. This must be prevented at any cost. Democratic solidarity among all segments of population in Manipur is indispensable.

(The author is one of India's most respected social scientists and specialises on the North-east. He has worked extensively and published widely on the region.)

Open forum

became a full-fledged state.

Earlier, the Kabu valley was under Manipur. In 1834, the British decided to put it under administrative control of Myanmar, with a provision that the latter will annually pay compensation to Manipur. In 1954, New Delhi agreed to the discontinuation of the practice without consulting Manipuri leaders. This is cited as India's insensitivity to Manipur's history and pride.

The other side of the picture

IN the late 1930s and early 1940s, a strong peasant movement took place in Manipur under the leadership of Irabot Singh - a prominent leader of the Communist Party of India. At the time of India's independence, he opposed Manipur's joining India. Some interpret his action to be in conformity with the more radical Communist leader Ranadive's line that he wanted to create a liberated area or even perhaps a Free Socialist Republic in Manipur. In September 1948, Manipur State Council declared Krishok Subha and Praja Sangh of Irabot Singh as unlawful organisations. In March 1949, the Governor of Assam had discussed with the King the "menace of Communist insurgency"

Apang's arithmetic

9/12/04 518
24/9
But rebel quotient bears watching

Arunachal's electorate cannot but fall in line for Gegong Apang, one-time longest serving chief minister in the North-east. He is a vote-puller, which fact the BJP realised last year and gifted him the post by engineering defections in the overwhelming Congress majority headed by Mukut Mithi. The apparent saffron motive was to return with the popular mandate in the October 7 assembly elections, but just when things were looking up the party lost power at the Centre. Apang's logical next step was to return to Congress with his entire ministerial team - after all, ethics and principles go out the window when survival is the issue and changing political affiliation is the hallmark of most North-east politicians. The state was always a Congress bastion until Apang quit in 1996 over the Chakma and Hajong refugees issue, but with the past buried the party hopes to cash in on his reputation as the epitome of peace and stability.

Judging by the 1999 election results, the Congress' electoral fortunes appear bright — it won 53 seats, four of these uncontested, in the 60-member House. None of the 38 candidates Apang's regional Arunachal Congress fielded won. Only he did. While the Nationalist Congress Party did well by bagging four seats, the BJP drew a blank. But the BJP's credible performance in the panchayat elections would suggest all is not lost for it. The party could not have been able to usurp power in Arunachal Pradesh without Naga militant support — they are active in Tirap and Changlang districts which together elect 12 legislators and they could influence voters. Soon after assuming office last year, Apang revoked the contentious Arunachal Pradesh Organised Crime Act to contain insurgency and granted these two districts autonomous status. Whether or not this good turn pays him dividends remains to be seen.

Fresh stir rages in Manipur

20/9 HC-3 J-N B S R
Blockade puts brakes on traffic movement on national highways

HTC & Agencies
Imphal, September 19

FRESH PROTESTS on Sunday ended a two-week lull in Manipur, with hundreds of people demonstrating against the army and demanding immediate repeal of the Armed Forces' Special Powers Act, which gives troops the power to shoot on sight and arrest without warrant.

The agitation comes close on the heels of Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil visit to the state. Patil refused to budge on the law, saying the security forces needed leeway to fight nearly 20 rebel groups active in Manipur.

The protesters have also announced a 16-day blockade in the state, starting early on Monday. "We have chalked out a massive action plan to continue our protests until the Act is withdrawn in its totality. Manipur will burn if New Delhi continues with its belligerent stand," Shiva Dutta, leader of the Apunba Lup, which is spearheading the protests, said.

Buses and trucks will not ply on the national highways in Manipur from tonight because of the blockade.

All passenger buses plying between Imphal and Guwahati along NH-39 and Imphal and Silchar along NH-53 will stop services during the blockade even if additional security was provided to them.

The bus services will resume only if a negotiated settlement is reached between the authorities and the agitators during the blockade, sources said.

A spokesman of the All-Manipur Transport Drivers and Motor Workers' Union said trucks and other heavy vehicles would also stop its



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Protesters burn effigies of the Prime Minister, home minister, chief minister and the Governor of Manipur at Tere Bazar in Imphal (West) demanding the withdrawal of Armed Forces' Special Powers Act from the state on Sunday.

services during the blockade. He added that the blockade has been called to press for withdrawal of the Act and there was no question of plying vehicles along the two highways in the state.

Official sources had earlier said the authorities were prepared to provide security to vehicles that wanted to continue services along the two national highways during the blockade. They said about 300-400 buses and heavy vehicles ply daily along NH-39 and NH-53.

The Apunba Lup main-

tains that it is better to face shortage of food and other essential items than to suffer the atrocities and excesses committed on civilians by central security forces deployed in the state under the Act.

"The people of Manipur want to live with dignity, like the citizens of other states, but the authorities deny them this right in the name of dealing with insurgency problem," a Apunba Lup spokesman said, adding that there were different laws to tackle the problem.

Northeast as a trade hub

By Amit Baruah

CAN NORTHEAST India link its economy to China and South-East Asia? Is New Delhi ready to relax its security paradigm to develop the region? Will the hawks in the Indian establishment be able to see China through non-suspicious eyes?

It was an unusual gathering that took place on September 10-11 in Guwahati to discuss the state of the region in all its dimensions. Organised by the Centre for North-East India, South and South-East Asia Studies, the gathering had intellectuals from North-East India, China specialists, Bangladeshi opinion-makers and, yes, Delhiwallahs.

India's difficult relationship with Bangladesh was reflected in a lively exchange between the Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs, Rejiv Sikri, and Mohammed Rahmatullah from the Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka.

Myanmar too figured in the discussions. India's inability to put in place a meaningful trade mechanism with Myanmar was clear. Speaker after speaker pointed to the fact that the thriving bazaar in Moreh, Manipur, had shifted across the border to Tamu in Myanmar despite the presence of an official trading post.

For some time to come, India's relationship with Bangladesh is likely to remain troubled. New Delhi could take some unilateral steps to improve it on the model of that with Sri Lanka — a preferential trade agree-

ment for Bangladeshi goods could be a good beginning.

At the same time, India cannot lose sight of the fact that major Northeast insurgent outfits use Bangladesh as a base. For some top insurgent leaders, Dhaka is the platform to "telephone" their views into Assam and neighbouring States.

Bangladesh needs to take India's concerns on the issue seriously.

trade linkages between India, Myanmar, and China through the Stilwell Road. According to him, Assam had presented at least two memorandums to the Centre demanding that this Road be re-opened as a link among India, Myanmar, and China.

The problems, however, are clear and direct. The Power Minister revealed that a "track two" Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar (BCIM)

It is time to shed suspicions and discuss a detailed partnership among Northeast India, China, Myanmar and, possibly, Bangladesh.

Several speakers, including the Assam Power and Forest Minister, Pradyut Bordoloi, made an impressive case for the re-opening of the World War II-vintage Stilwell Road — the 1,726-km link from Ledo (Assam) through Arunachal Pradesh into Myanmar and then on to Kunming in south-western China.

The Stilwell Road, named after the American General Joseph Stilwell, was a demonstration of the links possible between India, Myanmar and China. Today, there is a case for its revival in a completely different context.

Mr. Bordoloi, MLA from Margherita in upper Assam, favoured looking at boundaries not as barriers but as gateways. In an audiovisual presentation, he made out a strong case for

demics from Kunming to discuss the non-formal inter-regional BCIM Initiative, which covers, among other issues, transport and trade. Clearly, the fact that the BCIM meeting was being organised in Margherita in "upper Assam" had something to do with the fact that the Chinese academics could not get a visa to attend the conference.

It is clear that New Delhi must drop its suspicious attitude towards the people living in the region. If Indian academics can travel to Yunnan, why can their Chinese colleagues not visit Assam? Such an attitude points to a distrust of people living in the Northeast, as if the state must protect itself from "these" people. If the region has live insurgencies and commercialised underground outfits, the Indian state should bear a large share of the blame.

It is time to shed these suspicions and discuss a detailed partnership among Northeast India, China, Myanmar and, possibly, Bangladesh. In China, it is the Yunnan Government that has been promoting the idea of cooperation among all these entities. Can Assam play the role of Yunnan in India?

The fact is that the Assamese, Bodos, Mizos, and Khasis have as good or as bad an idea of nationhood as Indians living in other parts of the country. Development and trans-national linkages will promote, not hinder, the ideas of peace and progress.

initiative to form linkages between the four countries was held in Margherita earlier this year. "At the last minute, the Chinese delegation could not turn up because they were denied visas," Mr. Bordoloi claimed.

Why did this happen? The Assam Minister laid the blame at the door of North and South Block in New Delhi. Posit this against the fact that on August 15, a Chinese delegation from the People's Liberation Army crossed into Bumla, Arunachal Pradesh, (an area which the Chinese claim as their own) and celebrated India's independence day along with the Indian military.

As the Chinese signal their intent to improve relations, the Government of

India denies visas to Chinese aca-

Centre bungles in Manipur

By Oken Jeet Sandham

UNION home minister Shivraj Patil's failed Manipur mission wasn't unexpected. Hardly any responsible leader of the conglomeration of 32 organisations spearheading the agitation for removal of the controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, held discussions with him since the major heads were arrested under the National Security Act prior to his arrival.

Manipur has been experiencing unspeakable hardship, much of which is due to the amateurish handling of issues by state and Central leaders. The north-eastern states, mostly bordering Myanmar, Bangladesh and China, have been facing insurgency problems over the decades and the leadership of the oldest insurgency – the Nagas – have been locked in a dialogue with New Delhi for over seven years. The solution to Manipur's crisis requires a multi-pronged strategy because over two dozen armed groups are operating in the state.

The princely state of Manipur became part of the Indian Union on 15 October 1949 through a "Merger Agreement" signed between the Maharaja of Manipur and the Government of India on 21 September 1949 at Shillong. The people still describe it as a "Forced Merger Agreement."

It was not only the mainland Indians who fought against the British; the people of the north-eastern region too made significant contribution such as Gopinath Bardoloi, the Premier of Assam, and many valiant fighters of Manipur including Bir Tikendrajit, General Thangal, Kajao and Paona Brajabasthi.

Manipuris are also devout Hindus, sometimes more Hindu than "mamlanders". A visit to Manipur during any Hindu festival will show how popular these festivals are and also the orthodoxy of the elders. One wonders why India failed to tap the rich resources of these people, including those who are prominent in the creative arts, such as Rattam Thiyam, the great theatre personality, and Aribam Syam Sharma, one of the finest filmmakers in the country. In sports too, Kunjarani Devi and others have shone for India.

The Manipuris' expectations of Patil's visit were shattered. Patil declared there were three shades of opinions on the controversial AFSPA – "One group wants to revoke the Act. The second wants to continue with it while the third wants it amended."

This clearly indicates that Patil lacked basic information or answers to simple questions: Why Manipur kept boiling for months? Why indefinite curfew was imposed soon after the Manorama episode? Why were there leading stories in almost all the national dailies and magazines for weeks? Why did a student leader, Pebam Chitaranjan, burn himself to death? Why did Manipuri women, among the most vocal yet conservative in traditions, strip in broad daylight in front of the 17 Assam Rifles' gate at the heart of Imphal city? Why is Irom



THE ONLY ONE SMILING? Union home minister Shivraj Patil's talks with Manipur agitators haven't taken off as he hoped. — Eastern Projections

Open forum

Sharmila, who first launched the crusade against AFSPA still continuing her fast unto death and being kept alive by being force-fed through the nose – for four years? These do not add up to three shades of opinion in Manipur.

There is but a single agenda – to remove the controversial AFSPA from Manipur and not just from seven constituencies of the capital. The casual and sometimes conflicting remarks of the Central leadership have only exposed their confusion. Without understanding the root cause of the problem, there can't be a solution.

Do we need more violence to draw the attention of the Centre? I think it is wrong on the part of the Government of India to pay attention only if people turn to violence.

The poor chief minister, O Ibobi Singh, has no option but to remove the operation of the AFSPA from some areas of Imphal despite warnings of Central leaders from his own party and the military top brass, which is opposed to the lifting of this draconian law in any form. Angered with Ibobi's action, the Centre had allegedly threatened that he either crack down on the agitators or else face dismissal and President's Rule or even be replaced by Th Devendra. Ibobi chose to crack down on the agitators and book them under NSA.

The Government of India should not forget one thing: they may crush underground or militant movements through force but never a mass movement. The current agitation in Manipur is the manifestation of the latter kind. It is a good sign, however, that some important mediators have indicated that there may be talks between the Centre and the agitating leaders.

Yet, I believe that unless India's leaders know the history of the region or understand its people, it will be difficult for them to handle the situation. Most leaders in Delhi think that the North-east is nothing but insurgency and can be contained with force. But they have never bothered to ask why these upsurges have taken place or continue to do so.

The AFSPA which was imposed in 1980 in Manipur to contain the rising activities of the Peoples Liberation Army has failed to achieve its target. Instead militant groups have been mushrooming and there are over 20 armed factions in Manipur. If the AFSPA could not contain the rising militant activities in the 1980s when underground organisations were few and their manpower small, where is the logic in the argument that the same Act would do the job after 24 years when the number of "underground" fighters has soared, as has the might of the State?

A time has come for policy makers to rethink the relevance of this unproductive law and find out a different way of tackling insurgency, for both in the short-term and in the long-term, as Manorama's case shows, it is the ordinary people who suffer the most.

It is also worth asking about the state government's justification in continuing the Act to curb "extortion". Is this not mockery? What about the forces under the chief minister's control? What are they doing? Does he not know that state government employees have been paying tax to underground groups for years? Some years back, the state police arrested some cashiers of government departments in Imphal for deducting a percentage from the salaries of employees to pay tax to the "underground".

Ibobi, as chief minister of Manipur, has a bounden duty to resolve the insurgency problems in the state and should at least try to bring one of the powerful underground groups out of the dozens to the negotiating table. If he cannot convince at least one underground group, he is not fit to be chief minister. He should know that he cannot initiate talks with the AFSPA in use.

Ibobi should invite intellectuals, intelligentsia and influential NGO leaders to brainstorm how to prevail upon the underground organisations to come for dialogue. He should help develop a bridge between civil society groups and the underground organisations because it is only through the former that a rapport can be established.

(The author is a Kohima-based freelance journalist.)

Draw the line

STB JNB 8/3
And rethink strategy in Manipur ✓

Army chief General NC Vij is entitled to his belief that troops are unable to effectively fight insurgents without the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. But has anything substantial been achieved in the past 24 years that the Act has been in force in Manipur? If Army personnel run amok in the name of counter-insurgency, ignore the norms of civility and defy the law itself — this has been happening in Manipur — the line has to be drawn somewhere. There has been a demand for the Act's withdrawal since the infamous July 1987 Oinam incident in which Assam Rifles personnel allegedly went berserk after rebels overran an outpost. What has outraged Manipuris is the manner in which Manorama Devi was allegedly abused and slain while in Assam Rifles' custody. A specifically trained paramilitary force, the Assam Rifles has been around for more than 150 years but is no longer alive with its image as a "Friend of the hill people". Under the operational command of the Army, the Home ministry is responsible for its upkeep.

The question of removing Assam Rifles from Manipur does not arise, but why can it not be allowed to function independently of the Army as was the practice before? It is considered one of the finest fighting forces trained in counter-insurgency operations and no force of its standing would like being reduced to playing policeman. Assam Rifles personnel should be confined to barracks, their help sought only when the civil authority finds this necessary. This could be one possible way out of an impasse. Since Union home minister Shivraj Patil has reportedly agreed to meet the Apunba Lup, the organisation leading the movement against the AF(SP) Act, this possibility is well worth exploring.

Manipur solution in sight

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32 agitating groups may meet Shivraj Patil next week

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, September 16

IN WHAT is being viewed as an important breakthrough to end the deadlock in Manipur, representatives of the Apunba Lup, the umbrella organisation of 32 agitating groups in the state, are expected to meet Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil here next week.

This, Home Ministry sources added, was indicated to Patil by Manipur Chief Minister Ibobi Singh, who met him this afternoon. Even during his visit to Manipur earlier this month, Patil had a brief meeting with representatives of the Apunba Lup but the talks failed as the protesters insisted on withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special-Powers Act (AFSPA) from the entire state.

Meanwhile, after his meeting with Patil, even Singh today ruled out the possibility of withdrawing the AFSPA Act from the entire state. The Act, he insisted, has been withdrawn only from the seven Assembly segments in the Imphal region.

Patil, however, said there was a view that some sections of the AFSPA Act should be reviewed. But the decision, he added, has to be tak-



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Manipur Chief Minister Ibobi Singh on his way back from the Prime Minister's Office in New Delhi on Thursday.

en by the Cabinet following detailed inputs from the security agencies and the Law Ministry. Singh said the Centre was open to the idea of looking into some sections of the AFSPA Act. Patil once again reiterated the Centre's commitment to talk to "anyone" in the state, including insurgent groups. Both Patil

and Singh believe the situation in the state has improved considerably.

Earlier, emerging from the meeting with Patil, Ibobi Singh said the Centre had agreed to review some portions of the AFSPA Act but ruled out its complete withdrawal from the state saying that "extortions and seces-

sionist and separatist movements are still going on in other areas of the state".

The state government had repealed the Act from the Imphal municipal area last month following widespread protests after Manorama Devi was allegedly raped and killed by Assam Rifles jawans on July 11. "They (protesters) are insisting (that the Act be withdrawn from the entire state). But at this juncture, it's not possible to withdraw it any further".

Nexus alleged

Asserting that Manorama Devi, whose death in the custody of Assam Rifles created a furore in Manipur, had "questionable credentials", Army Chief N.C. Vij said in Srinagar that there were reports of her "underground" connections. "As far as the credentials of this lady are concerned, they're questionable. She was, from all accounts, mixed up with the underground. There are reports available on that," Vij told reporters.

Referring to the post-mortem report of Manorama, which reportedly ruled out her rape in custody, the Army Chief said, "It's clear that there's no rape and I think this is one fact which

Army not for withdrawal of Special Powers Act

HD 7
14/9
J N B. Grotus

By Sandeep Dikshit

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 13. The Chief of the Army Staff, N.C. Vij, today told the Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, that counter-insurgency operations in Manipur would be compromised if the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act was further diluted or withdrawn.

In a presentation to Mr. Patil here, Gen. Vij said the withdrawal of the AFSPA from Manipur could give rise to similar demands from other States in the North-East and Jammu and Kashmir. He was articulating the dominant view in the security establishment about the need to have the AFSPA for fighting insurgency. The AFSPA gave wide-ranging powers to the Army and enabled it to remain "aggressive" in combating militancy.

Reopening talks

The Centre has indicated to the former Manipur Chief Minister, Rishang Keishing, MP that it was not averse to reopening talks with the agitating students. Mr. Keishing called on Mr. Patil today. The meeting took place in the backdrop of Mr. Patil's visit to the State earlier this month when the Apunba Lup, a group of 32 organisations demanding the withdrawal of AFSPA, walked out of a meeting with Mr. Patil. Mr. Keishing told *The Hindu* that when he conveyed to Mr. Patil the willingness of the Apunba Lup to resume talks in Delhi, "I found that the Home Minister was quite prepared to talk".

On the other hand, official sources were tight-lipped on Gen. Vij's meeting with Mr. Patil but it is said that Gen. Vij pointed out that withdrawal of the AFSPA from the municipal limits of Imphal had weakened the counter-insurgency drive in the city. Emerging from the pre-

sentation, Gen. Vij refused to give details and said that "it was a regular meeting on everything concerning security."

Sources said that such meetings between the Home Minister and the Army chief took place every month in view of the Army's heavy involvement in internal security duties. The meetings were "omnibus" in nature though it was admitted that Manipur figured more prominently in today's interaction.

The sources said that the Army officers who made the presentation to Mr. Patil indicated that they were simply forwarding their assessment of the situation and it should not be read as an ultimatum of any sort. At the same time, they recalled that the former Army chief, V.P. Malik, had strongly reacted to the move initiated by a section of the security establishment some time ago to withdraw the AFSPA.

The Assam Rifles — commanded and largely staffed with Army personnel — could not do without the AFSPA in the North-East, he had told the then Cabinet Committee on Security.

The Army's perception would be a crucial input in the Centre's strategy to deal with the unrest in Manipur triggered by the alleged rape and killing of a Manipuri woman, Thangjam Manorama Devi, by men of the 17th Assam Rifles. Mr. Patil today called on the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and briefed him on the situation in Manipur as the first step in this direction.

Both Gen. Vij and Mr. Patil have visited Manipur to get a first-hand account of the situation. Gen. Vij conveyed his impression to Mr. Patil, after interacting with senior officers of Assam Rifles, the largest counter-insurgency force operating in the North-East.

By tribe alone

of NCSN
NSCN (IM) counting its chickens... 5.8
13/9

A National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) advertisement in a Dimapur-based daily inviting applications for the posts of under-secretary and section officers is of substantial interest and the response — particularly from Manipur's Senapati district, from where the outfit draws its cadres and Ukhrlul, home district of general-secretary Thuingaleng Muivah — is likely to be overwhelming. There is little doubt that all applicants will be Nagas but the insertion is quite specific about candidates and their tribes. The absence of caste system and names offering little clue to status, this clause serves to expose how deep tribalism runs in Naga society. This recruitment is the logical next step to successful peace talks but so far nothing is clear about future government structure. Will the NSCN-IM, in the event of a negotiated settlement, have its own civil set-up and render the present lot redundant? This is a possibility unless the leadership opts for a peaceful transfer of power as in Mizoram where former chief minister Lalthanhawla sacrificed his democratically-elected government to make way for rebel Mizo National Front leader Laldenga following the 1986 Mizo peace accord.

The NSCN-IM, though, is counting its chickens before they are hatched because as of now there is no sign of when the second round of peace talks will resume. Nor has there been any significant progress towards reconciliation initiated by the Naga Hoho, an opinion-forming apex council of elders. Contrarily, the process has floundered since the en masse resignation by Naga National Reconciliation Council members following scathing criticism of its composition by the NSCN-IM leadership. The Isak-Muivah faction, however, seems intolerant of everything outside its writ and its aggressive demands make a breakthrough well-nigh impossible.

THE STATESMAN

13 SEP 2004

মৃত মনোরমাও বলছেন এসো, ধর্ষণ করো আমাকে

অশোক সেনগুপ্ত • গুয়াহাটি

৮ সেপ্টেম্বর: জেদি এক মহিলা। শরীরের সব শক্তি দিয়ে যিনি চালিয়ে যাওয়ার চেষ্টা করছেন তাঁর অনশন-প্রতিবাদ। সর্বশক্তি দিয়ে সেই প্রতিবাদ ভেঙে দেওয়ার চেষ্টা করছে সরকার। কিন্তু সফল হচ্ছে না। সেই মহিলা অর্থাৎ ইরম শর্মিলার লড়াই সেনাবাহিনীর বিশেষ ক্ষমতার আইন (এএফএসপিএ) বিলোপের দাবিতে। শর্মিলার লড়াই মনোরমা-কাণ্ডের জেরে আজ আশুন ধরিয়ে দিয়েছে মণিপুরের আমজনতার মনে।

‘রিয়েল লাইফ’ এ বার এল ‘রিল লাইফ’— মণিপুর নিয়ে হয়েছে সিনেমা, মনোরমাকে নিয়ে নাটক।

মণিপুরের ‘প্রকৃত ঘটনা’ দেশে বিদেশে ছড়িয়ে দিতে ‘নর্থ ইস্ট নেটওয়ার্ক’ নামে মহিলাদের একটি স্বেচ্ছাসেবী সংগঠন তৈরি করেছে একটি তথ্যচিত্র। ৪৫ মিনিটের এই ছবির নাম ‘সোলজার্স ইন দি সারং’। মণিপুরি মহিলারা লুঙ্গির মতো যে পোশাক পরেন, তার নাম ‘সারং’। তা থেকেই ছবির নামকরণ।

এনইএন-র সভানেত্রী মণীষা বেহাল জানান, তথ্যচিত্রটি পাঠানো হয়েছে প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহের কাছে। পাঠানো হয়েছে রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জ,

আমনেস্টি ইন্টারন্যাশনাল-সহ আন্তর্জাতিক কিছু প্রতিষ্ঠানে। বিভিন্ন শহরে আমন্ত্রিতদেরও দেখানো হচ্ছে।

নির্দিষ্ট কোনও চরিত্র অবশ্য নয়, ছবিটিতে জোর দেওয়া হয়েছে মণিপুরের ‘সেনা অত্যাচারের’ উপরে। সেখানকার মহিলা সংগঠন ‘মাইরা পাইবি’-র প্রতিবাদী নানা কাজের উদাহরণ দেখানো হয়েছে এতে। এই প্রতিবাদীরাই মণিপুরে জোর আন্দোলন করেছেন ঘরে ঘরে মাদকের প্রভাব রুখতে। মনোরমা কাণ্ডের পরে প্রতিবাদ জানাতে কাংলা দুর্গের সামনে এই মহিলারা নগ্ন প্রতিবাদ জানিয়েছেন সেনা নির্যাতনের। মনোরমা প্রসঙ্গে জ্বলন্ত মণিপুরকে ঠান্ডা করতে সশস্ত্র জওয়ানেরা যখন দাপিয়ে বেড়াচ্ছে, রাইফেলের সামনে বুক পেতে দিয়েছেন এই মহিলারা।

মণিপুর বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের শিক্ষক লোকেন্দ্র আরামবাম একজন নাট্য ব্যক্তিত্ব। তাঁর নির্দেশনায় তৈরি এই ছবি মণিপুরের গত এক দশকের একটা প্রামাণ্য প্রেক্ষাপট। এতে দেখা যাবে, ঠিক কোন পরিস্থিতিতে তিন বছর আগে এএফএসপিএ প্রত্যাহারের দাবিতে অনশন শুরু করেন শর্মিলা। তাঁকে বাঁচিয়ে রাখতে হাসপাতালের শয়্যায় দিনের পর দিন কী ভাবে নাকে নল ঢুকিয়ে জোর করে বাঁচিয়ে রাখা

হচ্ছে এই প্রতিবাদীকে। বেশি জোর দেওয়া হয়েছে জওয়ানদের দাপটে মানুষের অসহায়তার উপরে।

এই ছবিতে মনোরমা সরাসরি আসেননি। এসেছেন ‘এসেনশিয়ালি ইয়েরমা ইন ইফল’-এ। ‘আনহাদ’ নামে এক সংগঠনের উদ্যোগে নয়াদিল্লির ‘থার্ড অ্যাক্ট-এর ব্যানারে এটি পরিচালনা করেছেন প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায় নাট্যপ্রেমী। ছবিতে সেনা অত্যাচারের পাশাপাশি তুলে ধরা হয়েছে কী ভাবে দিনের পর দিন মণিপুর ও সংলগ্ন অঞ্চল অবহেলিত হয়েছে।

‘এসেনশিয়ালি ইয়েরমা...’-তে মনোরমা হয়েছেন প্রণববাবু নিজে। মনোরমাকে সেনাদের ধরে নিয়ে যাওয়া এবং এক দিন না কাটতেই সেনা হেফাজতে তাঁর মৃত্যু— মূলত এই ব্যাপারটাকে নিয়ে ১২ মিনিটের সিনেমা। শেষ হতেই মঞ্চে এর দ্যোতক। কুশীলবদের পরনে কালো জামা, কালো প্যান্ট। ওঁরা প্রায় সবাই দিল্লির ছাত্রছাত্রী। মঞ্চে শেষ দৃশ্যে ছড়িয়ে থাকা মরদেহ। ‘মৃত’ মনোরমা সেনাদের বলছেন: “তোমরা সব চূপ কেন? কথা বললেও আমি তো মরে গিয়েছি। এসো, ধর্ষণ করো আমাকে।”

সব মিলিয়ে একটি নাটক এবং একটি তথ্যচিত্র ফুটিয়ে তুলছে কতটা বিপন্ন হতে পারে মণিপুর।

ANAR...

9 SEP 2004

Prioritise progress

Patil's remedy impractical

Every party in power at the Centre since the early 1990s has, in the absence of a pragmatic approach, invariably tried to please the North-east by doling out money in the belief that development should precede peace with militants. If a few favoured the other way round, some North-east leaders wanted both to go side by side, as Union home minister Shivraj Patil seems to agree. But however well-intentioned his emphasis on scientific utilisation of the region's natural resources, its hydel power potential and the opening of trade routes and highways to neighbouring South-east Asian countries, it does not seem feasible in the prevailing circumstances where one finds a militant presence in every scheme launched. Manipur's Thoubal multi-purpose irrigation project, work on which started in the 1970s and which was to help double-cropping, is yet to be completed because of Naga rebels objecting to the construction of a dam.

Instead of being fed theoretical remedies, the region would be best served if local governments work towards ensuring rebel outfits do not interfere with construction work. And the Centre need pay particular attention to early completion of on-going projects like the multi-crore rupee hydel scheme in Arunachal Pradesh; conversion of the 208-km Lumding-Silchar metre gauge via Lanka which, when completed, will help landlocked Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura; and the 178-km Kumarghat-Agartala rail link. Trade with Myanmar through Manipur's border town of Moreh is yet to pick up after nearly 10 years of its being legalised because rebels rule the highway. However strong on theory he may be, practicality demands that Patil realise an egg needs breaking to make an omelette.

শূন্য হাতে ফিরে গেলেন পাটিল

আশোক সেনগুপ্ত ● শিলং

৬ সেপ্টেম্বর: মণিপুর-সহ উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতে শান্তি ফেরানোর চেষ্টায় এসে শূন্য হাতে ফিরে গেলেন কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল। তাঁর তিন দিনের সরকারি সফর কার্যত ব্যর্থ হল। মণিপুরের সেনা বাহিনীর বিশেষ ক্ষমতার আইনের (এএফএসপিএ) পরিবর্তন হবে কিনা— সফর শেষে সেই প্রশ্নের ধার দিয়েও গেলেন না কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী।

ইফল থেকে আজ সকালে নির্ধারিত সময়ের দু'ঘণ্টা বাদে তিনি শিলঙে আসেন। সাংবাদিকদের বলেন, “আমরা মণিপুরের শান্তি, সমৃদ্ধি এবং উন্নয়ন চাই।” কিন্তু কী ভাবে সেটা সম্ভব, মন্ত্রী তাঁর কোনও উত্তর দিতে পারেননি। মণিপুরে তাঁর এই সফরে আদৌ লাভ কী হয়েছে, এই প্রশ্নের

উত্তরে পাটিলের দাবি “কিছুটাতে হয়েইছে। পরস্পরকে বোঝার চেষ্টা করেছি। দিল্লিতে ওঁদের আমন্ত্রণ জানিয়েছি। সংসদ ভবন, লালকেল্লা— যেখানে হোক ওঁরা বৈঠকে বসতে পারেন। আমন্ত্রণে সায় দেওয়াটা ওঁদের ইচ্ছে।” মণিপুরে মুশকিল আসানের জন্য প্রধানমন্ত্রী আসতে পারেন কিনা— এই প্রশ্ন করলে পাটিল বলেন, “প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে সারা দেশের সমস্যা দেখতে হয়। জরুরি প্রয়োজন হলে তিনি নিশ্চয়ই আসার কথা ভাববেন।”

উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতে জঙ্গি সমস্যা নিয়ে কথা বলতে এই অঞ্চলের সাংসদদের নিয়ে একটি ‘ফোরাম’ তৈরির প্রস্তাব দেওয়া হয় পাটিলকে। উত্তর-পূর্বের সাংসদেরা শিলঙে আজ মন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে বৈঠকে এই প্রস্তাব দেন। তাঁরা বলেন, কাশ্মীরে প্রাক্তন কেন্দ্রীয়মন্ত্রী রাম জেঠমলানির নেতৃত্বে

এই রকম একটি কমিটি তৈরি হয়েছে। এই প্রসঙ্গে পাটিল পরে সাংবাদিকদের বলেন, কাশ্মীরের ওই প্রক্রিয়াটি চলছে ব্যক্তিগত পর্যায়ে। সাংবিধানিক কাঠামো মেনে রাষ্ট্রীয় স্তরে এই রকম কমিটি তৈরির অসুবিধা থাকতে পারে। তবে, শান্তি প্রক্রিয়ার জন্য কেউ মধ্যস্থতা করতে চাইলে কেন্দ্রের আপত্তি নেই। বরং সেই উদ্যোগকে স্বাগত জানানো হবে।

স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী ও উত্তর-পূর্ব উন্নয়ন মন্ত্রী পি আর কিণ্ডিয়া আজ উত্তর-পূর্ব পরিষদের (এনইসি) কর্তাদের সঙ্গেও শিলঙে বৈঠকে বসেন। সেখানে কী সিদ্ধান্ত হল, উত্তর-পূর্বের জন্য বাড়তি অর্থ সঙ্কলনের সম্ভাবনা আছে কিনা—এর উত্তরে পাটিল বলেন, “সিদ্ধান্ত কিছু হয়নি। আমি এনইসি-র নীতি, পরিকল্পনা, কাজের পদ্ধতি— এই সব বোঝার চেষ্টা করছি মাত্র।”

ফের আন্দোলন শুরু মণিপুরে

প্রভাত ঘোষ ● ইফল

৬ সেপ্টেম্বর: বিক্ষোভকারী ৩২টি সংগঠনের সর্বোচ্চ মঞ্চ ‘আপনবা লুপ’-এর সঙ্গে কাল রাতে কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিলের অসফল বৈঠকের পরে আজ আবার বিক্ষোভের আগুনে ঘূতাহতি পড়ল। এক দিকে ছাত্রছাত্রীরা ক্লাস বয়কট করলেন, অন্য দিকে মহিলারা বিভিন্ন ‘ইমা কেইঠেল’ (মহিলা পরিচালিত বাজার) বন্ধ রাখলেন। বিকালে লুপ জানায়, এত দিন গান্ধিজির আদর্শ মেনে অসহযোগ আন্দোলন চলছিল। আজ থেকে তা আরও তীব্র হল। মহিলারা জানান, বহু মনোরমা প্রাণ বিসর্জন দিতে প্রস্তুত।

কাল রাতে আপনবা লুপের মুখপাত্র আইনজীবী লেইতানথেম

উমাকান্ত অত্যন্ত উত্তেজিত ভঙ্গিতে সঙ্গীসাথীদের নিয়ে রাজভবনের ব্যাঙ্কোয়েট হল থেকে বেরিয়ে ঘোষণা করেন, “বৈঠক ব্যর্থ। আন্দোলন চলবে।” এ কথা শোনার অপেক্ষায় আর বসে থাকেননি মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ওকরাম ইবোবি সিংহ, তাঁর মুখ্যসচিব জার্নেল সিংহ। আন্দোলনের জেরে রাজ্যের যাবতীয় প্রতিষ্ঠান বন্ধ থাকায় সরকারি কর্মীদের বেতন দেওয়া যায়নি। তাই কাল ১২ মিনিটের বৈঠক কোন দিকে গড়াতে চলেছে, আঁচ পেয়েই মুখ্যসচিব প্রতি বিভাগে খবর পাঠিয়ে দেন, যে করে হোক সোমবার অগস্ট মাসের বেতন দিতেই হবে। অর্থ বিভাগের সংশ্লিষ্ট কর্মীদের বাড়ি থেকে তুলে আনা হয় যুক্তকালীন তৎপরতায়। আজ সকাল থেকেই সব কাজকর্ম বন্ধ রেখে

বেতন দেওয়া শুরু হয়। সকাল থেকে প্রতিটি ব্যাঙ্কে লম্বা লাইন পড়ে যায়। আর ছিল পাহারা দেওয়ার জন্য ছিল সাঁজোয়া গাড়ি সমেত আধা-সামরিক বাহিনী। এমনকী, ব্যাঙ্কের সামনে ভিড় সামলানোর জন্য শহরের বিভিন্ন প্রান্ত থেকে ট্রাফিক পুলিশদের তুলে আনা হয়। সব সরকারি দফতরই আজ ছিল কানায় কানায় ভর্তি। তবে কাগজপত্র সময়মতো না-আসায় বহু কর্মীকেই বেতন ছাড়াই ফিরতে হয়।

এই পরিস্থিতির আঁচ পাননি আপনবা লুপ নেতৃত্ব। তাই বিকালে তাঁরা জানান, এ বার আন্দোলন আরও তীব্র হবে। সরকারি দফতর বয়কট, অন্য রাজ্যে তৈরি পণ্য বয়কট, সরকারের সঙ্গে অসহযোগিতার মাত্রা বাড়ানোর আবেদন জানানো হয়েছে।

বৈঠক ব্যর্থ, আন্দোলন চলবে মণিপুরে

১৭ সেপ্টেম্বর: স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিলের সঙ্গে বিক্ষোভকারী সংগঠনগুলির বহু-প্রতীক্ষিত বৈঠক শুরু হয়েও ভেঙে গিয়েছে। ফলে নতুন করে আন্দোলনের ডাক দিয়েছে বিক্ষোভকারীরা। এই সংগঠনগুলির মঞ্চ আপনবা লুপ প্রথমে সশস্ত্র বাহিনীর বিশেষ ক্ষমতা আইন প্রত্যাহারের দাবি জানালেও পরে এ ব্যাপারে নমনীয় হয়েছিল। কিন্তু লুপের নেতাদের দাবি স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী এই আইনের বিষয়ে কোনও কথা বলতেই রাজি হননি।

তবে তাঁরা প্রায় শ'দুয়েক পাতার একটি রিপোর্ট স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রীর হাতে তুলে দিয়েছেন। এই রিপোর্টে সশস্ত্র বাহিনীর বিশেষ ক্ষমতা আইনের কুপ্রভাবে মণিপুরে দীর্ঘ দিন ধরে সেনার অত্যাচারের ঘটনাগুলি বিস্তারিত ভাবে তুলে ধরা হয়েছে। অবশ্য পাটিল রিপোর্টটিকে মোটেও আমল দেননি। এ দিকে, বৈঠকের পরেই অনুষ্ঠিত সাংবাদিক সম্মেলনে শিবরাজ বলেন, আইন পর্যালোচনা করা হবে না, এমন কথা বলিনি। তিনি জানান এ বিষয়ে তিন রকম দাবি উঠেছে। কেউ এটির বিলোপ চাইছেন, কেউ এটিকে বহাল রাখতে চাইছেন, আর কেউ কেউ চান পর্যালোচনা। তিনি সব ক'টি সম্ভাবনা খতিয়ে দেখার আশ্বাস দিয়েছেন। বিক্ষোভকারীদের সম্মানতুল্য বলে উল্লেখ করে স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী গণমাধ্যমের সাহায্যে তাঁদের রাজ্য সরকারের সঙ্গে আলোচনার আহ্বান জানিয়েছেন।

মণিপুরকে অর্থনৈতিক ভাবে শক্তিশালী করে তোলা হবে বলেও সম্মেলনে জানিয়েছেন শিবরাজ।

তবে কী ভাবে তা করা হবে সে বিষয়ে তিনি কোনও মন্তব্য করেননি। তাঁর কাছে প্রশ্ন রাখা হয়েছিল, কেন্দ্র পোটা প্রত্যাহার করতে সচেষ্ট অথচ বিশেষ ক্ষমতা আইন বিলোপে তাদের এত অস্বস্তি কেন? উত্তরে স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী বলেন, পোটার সঙ্গে এই আইনের প্রচুর ফারাক রয়েছে। পোটার স্বেচ্ছাচারের অনেক সম্ভাবনা রয়েছে। তাই তুলে নেওয়া প্রয়োজন। সেনা জওয়ানদের ভাই বলে উল্লেখ করে শিবরাজ এ দিন বলেন, তাঁরা আমাদের প্রাণ দিয়ে রক্ষা করেন। তবে কখনও কখনও তাঁদেরও দোষত্রুটি হয়।

মণিপুরের প্রাচীন রাজাদের কাংলা দুর্গে দীর্ঘ দিন ঘাঁটি গেড়ে বসে রয়েছে অসম রাইফেলস। এই দুর্গ মণিপুরের ঐতিহ্যের সঙ্গে জড়িত। তাই এ বিষয়ে জনতার মধ্যে বিক্ষোভ বাড়ছে। শিবরাজ এ দিন অসম রাইফেলসের সদর দফতর কাংলা দুর্গ থেকে সরানোর দাবি বেশ বিরক্ত ভাবেই মেনে নেন। ডিসেম্বরের আগেই সেনা সরানো হবে বলে তিনি আশ্বাস দেন। সি পি এম ও আর এস পি'র সাংসদেরা মণিপুরের সাম্প্রতিক পরিস্থিতিতে এই আইন পর্যালোচনা বা প্রত্যাহারের সুপারিশ করবেন বলে জানিয়েছিলেন। এ প্রসঙ্গে স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রীর প্রতিক্রিয়া, বামেদের সঙ্গে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের কথা হয়ে গিয়েছে। তাঁরা এ বিষয়ে যে কোনও সিদ্ধান্তের দায়িত্ব কেন্দ্রের উপরেই ছেড়ে দিয়েছেন।

এ দিকে, মণিপুরের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ওকরাম ইবোবি সিংহের রাজনৈতিক চালেই রাজ্যে বিক্ষোভ ক্রমশ লাগামছাড়া হয়ে উঠছে বলে দাবি করেছেন তাঁর নিজের দল কংগ্রেসের অধিকাংশ বিধায়ক। তাঁদের অভিযোগ, বিক্ষোভ থামানোর ব্যবস্থা না-করে তিনি

প্রমাণ করার চেষ্টা করছেন, এই বিক্ষোভে জনতার সাহায্য নেই, জঙ্গিদের মদতেই এটি অনুষ্ঠিত হচ্ছে। আর তা প্রমাণ করতে পারলে বিক্ষোভ থামানোর নামে দমন নীতি প্রয়োগ করে কেন্দ্রের কাছে নাম কিনতে তাঁর সুবিধা হবে।

সফররত কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিলকে তাঁরা ব্যাপারটি বোঝানোর চেষ্টা করেছেন। তাঁদের দাবি, অবিলম্বে ইবোবিকে মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর পদ থেকে সরিয়ে দেওয়া হোক। বিষয়টি নিয়ে আরও ব্যাপক ভাবে কেন্দ্রের কাছে দরবার করতে ২১ জন বিক্ষুব্ধ বিধায়ক বুধবার দিল্লি যাওয়ারও সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছেন। উপ-মুখ্যমন্ত্রী দেবেন্দ্র ও বিক্ষুব্ধদের সঙ্গে রয়েছেন বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে। কাল দুপুরে পাটিলের সঙ্গে বিক্ষোভকারী সংগঠনগুলির নির্ধারিত বৈঠকে আপনবা লুপ-কে আনার জন্য সরকারের তরফে কোনও তৎপরতা ছিল না বলে বিক্ষুব্ধদের দাবি। শুধু রাজ্য স্বরাষ্ট্র দফতরের তরফে এক নবীন যুগ্মসচিবকে দিয়ে লুপ-এর কাছে আমন্ত্রণ পাঠানো হয়। কিন্তু ইতিমধ্যে ইফল পূর্ব জেলার পুলিশ সুপার এন চন্দ্রমণি সিংহ বিক্ষোভকারী দু'টি ছাত্র সংগঠনের দুই প্রধান নেতাকে গ্রেফতার করে বসেন। ফলে আলোচনার প্রস্তাব ধাক্কা খায়।

আজ বেলা দশটা নাগাদ জানা যায়, এক ছাত্র নেতাকে প্রচণ্ড প্রহার করে ছেড়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে। অন্য জনকে ম্যাজিস্ট্রেটের এজলাশে হাজির করা হলে দেশবিরোধী স্লোগান ও নিষিদ্ধ কাংলাইপাক কমিউনিস্ট পার্টির সঙ্গে যোগাযোগের সন্দেহে পুলিশ ও বিচারবিভাগীয় হেফাজতে রাখার নির্দেশ দেওয়া হয়েছিল। আপনবা লুপও আলোচনায় বেঁকে বসে।

Bandh greets Patil in Manipur

Stir leaders delay meeting home minister to press for demand to release arrested team member

Press Trust of India
Imphal, September 5

CENTRAL PARAMILITARY forces and police were heavily deployed at various points as a 12-hour general strike—called by agitation leaders to press for removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act—crippled normal life in Manipur today.

Official sources said central forces also stepped up patrolling at different places in Imphal and greater Imphal areas in view of the strike which began at 6 am and visit of Union home minister Shivraj Patil. Sources said strict security measures were taken to prevent any untoward incident as people preferred to remain indoors in response to the call of the general strike.

The separatist Revolutionary People's Front, political wing of the banned People's Liberation Army (PLA), had also earlier called for boycott of Patil's visit as it (the visit) would not result in any solution to Manipur's problems, an RPF release said.

A seven-member delegation of 32 organisations spearheading the current stir decided to call on Union home minister today to press the demand for immediate lifting of the Act. The agitation leaders had, initially, delayed meeting Patil as a delegation member who had been arrested earlier by the police was yet to be released.

Sources in the working committee of the 32 organisations spearheading the current stir said president of the Manipur Forward Youth Front (MFYF) Sapamcha Kangleipal was a member of the delegation who would call on Patil. They said Kangleipal was arrested yesterday when he was on his way to attend an important working committee meeting to discuss whether the agitation leaders would meet the home minister or not.

Official sources said Kangleipal might be released any time. The committee sources said if Kangleipal was not included in the delegation, it (committee) would reconsider whether the delegation would call on the Home minister or not. Sources said agitation leaders had earlier expressed their unwillingness to meet the Central leaders because of 'indifferent' attitude of the state government by



Manipuri women take out a torch rally at Nongbrang in Thoubal district on Saturday demanding repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act.

arresting agitation leaders on one hand and extending invitation for talk on the other.

The Union home minister—who was briefed on security situation by top officials soon after his arrival—discussed the overall situation arising out of the continuing stir for removal of the Act with Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh and senior officials.

Patil will also meet and discuss the situation with prominent public leaders, including former chief ministers—Rishang Keishing, R.K. Dorendara Singh, W. Nipamacha Singh, R.K. Ranbir Singh and Radhabinod Koijam. Sources

also said the Union home minister would also meet representatives from different civil society groups.

In Meghalaya, meanwhile, the D.D. Lapang government has described militancy in the state as a danger "still grave" and asked the Centre to introduce multi-purpose identity cards to prevent influx and upgrade it to 'A' category from the present 'B1' for total funding for the modernisation of its police.

As a financial crunch had gripped the state, it asked the Centre to accord it category 'A' status, which would enable with full funding. The present 'B1' category

brought Meghalaya 75 per cent Central funds with the state providing the rest.

The government asked for introduction of multi-purpose identity cards to tackle the problem of influx in the state where 80 per cent of its population was indigenous tribals. Work permits for foreign nationals were also sought to be implemented in the state.

Tarun Gogoi, Assam chief minister, has also urged Shivraj Patil for diplomatic pressure on the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar to evict North-east militants camping in those countries. Mil-

itants from Assam were being provided shelter in Nagaland and Arunachal by NSCN cadres.

Shivraj Patil, however, said security is not the "biggest problem" for the North-east, but development and unemployment are. After chairing a four-hour long meet with N-E chief ministers on internal security and development yesterday, he said the problem for the region was why, in spite of being the "richest" part of the country in natural resources, it was not developed. He called for tapping resources of potential sectors like hydro-electricity to develop the region.

PTI

Amid crisis, Cong plots to topple Ibobi govt

**SAMUDRA GUPTA
KASHYAP**
IMPHAL, SEPTEMBER 5

THE crisis sparked off by the alleged rape and murder of 32-year-old Thangjam Manorama Devi by Assam Rifles personnel on July 11 continues to remain unresolved. But that does not seem to deter legislators in Manipur from indulging in their favourite pastime, that of toppling the government.

At least 21 legislators belonging to the Congress, the main coalition partner of the 39-member ruling SPJ, have already started a move to oust Okram Ibobi Singh, Chief Minister since March 2002, com-

plaining that he was inefficient and had proved this by "mis-handling" the current crisis.

A senior Congress legislator said on the condition of anonymity here today that the Manorama episode could have been stopped from snowballing into a major issue had Chief Minister Ibobi Singh taken timely decisions. "We told him repeatedly to tread cautiously, but he would not listen to us. Instead, he depended solely on bureaucrats who had nothing to gain or lose from the crisis," the Congress legislator said, adding that a delegation of seven Congress MLAs would leave for Delhi on Wednesday to apprise the high command about the way Ibobi Singh was mishandling the situation.



A torch rally at Nongbrang in Thoubal district on Saturday demanding the repeal of the AFSPA. P71

Manipur's politicians are notorious for toppling governments, not letting any CM last more than two or three years, and contractor-turned-politician Ibobi Singh had apparently already commulated his outa

legislator who had lost his ministry in the downsizing exercise.

The disgruntled legislators, however, refused to admit that their disgust against Ibobi Singh had its roots in the downsizing of the ministry. "It is not like that. It is a question of governance. Everybody is saying there is no government in Manipur. Had the CM made one visit to Manorama Devi's residence, things would have been different. The public is angry with him, and the CM says the insurgents are instigating the public," said one of the seven legislators who is slated to leave for Delhi next week.

Interestingly, while Ibobi Singh had initially drawn flak from Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee for having with-

drawn the controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act from the Greater Imphal municipal area, Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil, too, was initially not amused with Ibobi's decision.

It was only on Saturday that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, during his first press conference in the Capital, for the first time patted Ibobi Singh on his back. "The Manipur government is grappling with a very difficult situation with commendable restraint. They deserve our support," he said on Saturday. Political observers here say Ibobi Singh would have faced a major revolt from within the CLP over the downsizing had the Manorama episode not occurred.

MANIPUR TALKS INCONCLUSIVE

Patil offers to meet insurgents

By Vinay Kumar with agencies

IMPHAL, SEPT. 5. The Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, tonight extended a call for talks to all insurgent groups and others in Manipur. This followed an inconclusive meeting he had with a delegation of the Apunba Lup, a group of 32 organisations spearheading the agitation for the withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) from the entire State.

Emerging after the nearly hour-long meeting with Mr. Patil at the Raj Bhavan here, the leaders of the Apunba Lup said "we had only one demand of withdrawal of the Act but that has not been accepted."

On his talks with the delegation, Mr. Patil said "they are bright young students who are angry."

Some of their demands could be accepted while on some others further discussions were necessary, he added. Asked why the AFSPA could not be withdrawn when the Prevention of Terrorism Act could be repealed, he said there were basic differences between the two provisions.

He said that POTA was enforceable in the entire country, but AFSPA had to be enforced either for six months or one year only in some parts where needed.

Mr. Patil, who arrived here from Shillong this afternoon,

vowed to deal with the situation in Manipur with "sympathy and understanding." He met public delegations, former Chief Ministers, political groups, opposition MLAs, top State Government officials and security agencies.

He also held separate meetings with the Governor, S.S. Sidhu and the Chief Minister, Ibobi Singh.

General strike

A general strike, called by the Apunba Lup, greeted him. Normal life came to a standstill and the city wore a deserted look. All the main markets were closed; children turned otherwise busy streets into impromptu playgrounds, watched by security personnel.

Security was tight, and the road leading from the airport and all main roundabouts were dotted by personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force, the Rapid Action Force and the State police.

Three former Chief Ministers — Reishang Keishing, Radhabinod Koijam and W. Nipamacha Singh — who met Mr. Patil at the Raj Bhavan, said they had a "frank and detailed" discussion with him.

Talking to reporters later, they said they were interested in a lasting solution to the problem in Manipur and pointed out that Manorama Devi's killing was not related to insurgency.

18 Army salve on Manipur 4/9

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Sept. 3: The Centre is keeping options open on the next step in Manipur where the movement demanding withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act has forced a rethink in the security establishment.

Senior leaders will meet over the next week to assess the situation after the visits of the army chief, General N.C. Vij, who was in Manipur today, and Union home minister Shivraj Patil, who is due in Imphal on Sunday.

The defence ministry and the army have staunchly argued against the act being withdrawn or diluted. The army has told the leadership that it would be severely handicapped in its counter-insurgency operations without the cover provided by the act.

But the Centre is still debating options, sources said. The security estab-

lishment has assessed that withdrawing the Assam Rifles would not be possible. The Assam Rifles is such a large force that its withdrawal will leave too large a gap in the security grid. No other paramilitary force can spare enough personnel to fill a void left by the Assam Rifles. Its role also defines it as the penultimate force before the army directly gets involved in an internal security situation.

General Vij today met chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh, according to a defence ministry release in Delhi. The army chief has "reiterated that the army was very keen to establish the truth and facts relating to the death of Thangjam Manorama".

The sources said that in large measure, the situation in Manipur would depend on the progress of the investigations into the killing of Manorama.

The army, on its part, says it is confident that its personnel will not be found

guilty. On the army chief's orders, the service has voluntarily sent for DNA testing the blood samples of all the soldiers in the patrolling party that had taken Manorama into custody. In his interactions in Manipur, Vij repeatedly stressed this point.

"We are very keen to establish the truth and facts relating to the death of Thangjam Manorama. It is for this reason that the army had on its initiative expeditiously organised blood samples of 33 personnel for the DNA test," the defence ministry statement said.

The general has "assured that should any culpability be established, the guilty will be most severely dealt with in keeping with the ethos and discipline of the army". Vij, the statement said, had made a "goodwill gesture" to the people of Manipur and had said that he has no objection to the Kangla Fort being handed over to the Manipur government at the earliest".

Manipur reflects NE dilemma

Action against Assam Rifles *jawans*, though welcome, will not solve the problem of Manipur or of the region as a whole; withdrawal of military forces in collaboration with a developmental strategy will, writes JK DUTT



A SUBSTANTIAL terrorist source is the stream of educated, unemployed youth. The tragedy and trauma that has befallen Manipur is truly lamentable and reflects the hopelessness of the people of this hapless state of India. There has been unending criticism and debate on the action of our security forces in Manipur apropos the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958. Notwithstanding the certitude of such deliberations, it would be revealing to delve into the issue in a holistic way instead of approaching it in an abstract fashion.

This infamous Act came into Manipur about 20 years back. It was first introduced in Nagaland – the Naga dominated areas of North-east India actually – by Jawaharlal Nehru over 45 years ago consequent to his failure in tackling Angami Zapu Phizo's demand for Naga independence. Nehru proclaimed himself to be a man of peace but his actions in NE India belied such proclamations. His vision of India comprised Kashmir, the "cow belt" and New Delhi. He did not particularly care whether the eastern portion of our country held any relevance in his agenda. One evidence of this was his unedifying remark during the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 when the Chinese army stood overlooking the Brahmaputra river, "...my heart goes out to the people of Assam..." This was the sum total of India's Prime Minister's accountability towards fulfilling his charter!

India's oldest insurgency, the Naga movement, has been handled egregiously by our leaders, right from Nehru's days. Seeing the Centre's in-

ability in addressing this insurgency, various other insurgent groups in NE India began to flex their might. Amazingly, the Centre's response to this was dispatching more troops to contain the turmoil that was gradually engulfing state after state. This was the biggest mistake. A socio-political cum socio-economic issue was treated as a security related one. It is inexplicable why an intelligent person like Nehru engaged such a modus operandi, one that went against his own self-declared principle of peaceful coexistence. Worse, this methodology has been ruthlessly instrumented by successive Prime Ministers after Nehru.

The NE is our country's most important geo-strategic region because of three factors: one, the region shares its borders with five foreign nations to include the crucial Tri Junction (India-China-Myanmar) area; two, it is one of the richest segments in terms of industrial potential; and three, it epitomises the very core of our existentialism depicting secularism, pluralism and multi-ethnic cohabitation. Despite this, the authorities have deliberately neglected this region for the past 57 years. The people of the NE have thus become wholly alienated and disenfranchised with New Delhi's posturing towards them, they have begun to gravitate psychologically towards China via Myanmar. Pakistan's ISI on its part has jumped on to a veritable readymade bandwagon and is effectively fuelling the fire. How long will this state of affairs continue?

The main grievance of the NE's residents is, in spite of their region being so wealthy in natural resour-

ces, precious little has been done to develop these resources. Tea, forestry, paper, oil and natural gas, petroleum, hydro electricity, tourism, fruit processing and handicrafts and handloom are some items of developmental inputs that can transform this region into a revenue churning goldmine.

The crux of it all is, development provides employment. The absence of employment leads to frustration, violence prone agitation, insurgency and ultimately a demand for secession. This in a nutshell is what is afflicting NE India. Added to this is the unabated influx of infiltrators from Bangladesh. Demography has gone haywire in many border districts, often resulting in communal massacres as had happened at Nelli, one of the worst cases, in the 80s. Doubtless, infiltration from across the border has been covertly encouraged by our politicians to suit their own vote bank interests.

Some glaring instances of discrimination against the NE are highly disconcerting. For example, no top-level Central government appointments are made from this region. We need to bear in mind that the NE represents one-fourth of our country, no less than eight states. Yet, appointments like those of the President and his Vice, the Prime Minister and his Deputy, Cabinet ministers, blue riband government secretaries, ambassadors and high commissioners, chiefs of the armed forces and paramilitary units, Chief Justices, heads of public sector undertakings, high profile governmental advisors, officers on exclusive special duty and so on are devoid of any appointees from the NE. Other

than an odd Purno Sangma, James Lyngdoh or Chokila Iyer, no other name comes to mind. Are people from the NE untouchables? Do they not possess one of the highest degrees of literacy and education? Are there any justifiable reasons for their being so openly sidetracked? If so deemed, surely a special quota can be allocated?

Whenever a foreign sports team comes to play in India, no fixtures are organised in the capitals of the NE states. The same goes for national championships. Don't the people

of NE India like sports and games? The region has produced a number of outstanding sportspersons. One might recollect that India's football captain at the 1948 Olympics was a Naga. Yet, no interest is shown by those who matter in bringing the NE on to India's sports map.

The most distressing part of it all has been New Delhi's permanent attention to Kashmir, again courtesy Nehru. It is a blatant case of half a state being given the world on a platter vis-à-vis a contiguous group of eight states that are offered periodic crumbs. Today, the Indian Railways are in the process of extending the track from Jammu northwards. What crime has the NE done to be deprived of even a modicum of communication infrastructure? New Delhi's feeble attempts to ameliorate the NE's deficiencies through the discredited North Eastern Council and its old-wine-in-a-new-bottle avatar, Department of North Eastern Region, have fooled no one, least of all the NE's residents.

Eventually, the region's people took recourse to the only effective mode in order to draw attention to the gross inequities that had been heaped on them, and that mode was by taking up arms against the state. They were virtually pushed into it. Instead of addressing the crisis through conscientious negotiations, the Centre sent the Indian Army to "quell the rebellion!" The fallout of this folly has been disastrous as Manipur has amply demonstrated. Every single state of the NE barring perhaps Sikkim, has been under military harness for as long as one can remember. All efforts by the NE's people to be treated as part and parcel of a united India have been rebuffed by New Delhi, cosmetics

being the sole proffering.

An incisive query is, who are these so-called insurgents operating in NE India? Are they Pakistanis, Chinese, Bangladeshis or of some other nationality? The unpalatable truth is, they are our very own unemployed lot who have realised that the state is least interested in their well being and instead is trying to suppress their aspirations by brute force. Obviously, such suppression has drawn an equal rebound. Amidst this conflict-ridden scenario, the *jawan* has been made into a convenient scapegoat. He is dubbed as the villain of the piece whereas the true culprit is the *neta* who has purposefully created this despairing scenario and is getting away scot-free.

How does one redress the tinderbox that is NE India? A radical change in our governance methodology is warranted. What we need is an independent ministry for the NE under a Cabinet-ranking minister who will be accountable to Parliament for all aspects of the NE's development. This ministry should be located at Guwahati with a sector headquarter each at Itanagar and Imphal. The ministry will execute an economic revolution in the region, ensuring that developmental progress rides in tandem with employment. This process must be given the widest publicity. All military units must be withdrawn and the police brought into full play as is normal in the other states of the country. The AFSP Act must be rescinded for good.

As part of this all-encompassing renaissance, the NE should be accorded the status of a special economic zone and be included as a constituent of India's newly formed "Look East" foreign policy. The NE should also be made a permanent component of the Kunming Initiative. West Bengal can be inducted into the scheme of things to facilitate the use of Kolkata's port and airport as trade points. For ease of administration, Arunachal Pradesh should be bifurcated into two separate states, East and West Arunachal, with Tezu as the East's capital.

Recalling the Kangla Fort incident, court-martialling the Assam Rifles' guilty persons will not solve the problem of Manipur. Nor will such parallel actions do likewise in other NE states. Complete withdrawal of the military forces in collaboration with developmental strategy will.

Tailpiece. Periodically, the Kashmiris threaten that they will seek secession from India if their interests are not looked after above and beyond everything else. It will not make the slightest difference to India if they carry out their threat. On the contrary if NE India secedes, India will certainly collapse.

(The author is a retired Lieutenant Colonel of The Indian Army.)

33 jawans' blood for rape test

OUR BUREAU

Imphal/New Delhi, Aug. 31: Blood samples were today collected from 33 Assam Rifles personnel for DNA tests to ascertain if any of them had raped Thangjam Manorama after her arrest on July 11.

The head of the forensic department of the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences supervised the collection of samples. The commandant of the Assam Rifles' 17th battalion, Col. Jagmohan Singh, was present during the process.

The DNA tests will be conducted in Calcutta. Tests conducted at Calcutta's Central Forensic Science Laboratory revealed semen stains on a garment that Manorama was wearing when she died in Assam Rifles' custody, lending credence to the allegation that she was sexually assaulted before being shot.

As the blood samples were being collected, officer-in-charge of Irilbung police station Gunindro Singh moved the Imphal chief judicial magistrate's court for DNA tests on any Assam Rifles jawan that the police investigation team might consider a suspect.

"We have moved court because the Assam Rifles authorities have not identified the suspects/accused personnel in the alleged rape. The question is, whose DNA is to be tested? Even if the Assam Rifles authorities produce the accused, how can we verify whether they are the real accused?" a senior police official asked.

The official said DNA tests on the 33 personnel from whom blood samples were collected might not reveal the truth.

"None of the 33 personnel who participated in the operation (to arrest Manorama) could be the culprit. The

woman may have been taken to one of their posts for interrogation and someone else may have committed the crime."

The army, under which the paramilitary force operates, has been insisting on DNA tests from the day the forensic report was made public. Col. Singh yesterday deposed before the C. Upendra Commission, which is investigating the circumstances leading to Manorama's death.

In Delhi, leaders of the Manipur Opposition urged the Centre to declare a "unilateral ceasefire" with militant groups active in the state as the first step towards defusing the crisis.

A delegation led by I. Hemochandra Singh submitted identical memoranda to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and home minister Shivraj Patil.

Manipur panel begins in-camera hearings

Press Trust of India
Imphal, August 30

THE C. Upendra Commission probing the rape and killing of Th Manorama Devi on Monday began in camera examination of the four Assam Rifles personnel accused of the crime as the agitation for the removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act from Manipur continued.

The Commission began proceedings from 11:00 am at the Imphal Central Jail in

MANORAMA KILLING

the presence of the counsels for the 17th Assam Rifles personnel and family members of Manorama Devi.

Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil would arrive here on September 5 on a two-day visit to hold discussions to assess the situation.

Official sources said that Patil would hold talks with representatives of various

groups and security officials and state leaders. The working committee of the 32 organisations spearheading the stir, in a statement, said if the Union Minister's visit to Manipur was not connected to the withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, it would be better for him to stay away.

The defence ministry had asked the state authorities to conduct DNA test of the four accused following reports by Central Forensic Science Laboratory, Kolkata that semen stains were found on the undergarments of Manorama.

Justice P.G. Agarwala of the Gauhati High Court had on August 27 ordered that the AR personnel could be examined at Central Jail after hearing two separate petitions filed by the Commandant of 17th Assam Rifles and the four constables challenging the state's notification on the constitution of the Commission.

Cycle rally, 50 held

A protest rally on bicycles was taken out from Keibi Taret Khu to Yumnao Khunou on Monday. About 50 students were arrested for attempting to handover textbooks to Manipur Governor S.S. Sidhu. Students destroyed hundreds of books before the Raj Bhavan gate.



College students staging a protest demanding repeal of AFSPA from Manipur being arrested in front of the chief minister's house in Imphal on Monday.

PTI

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

31 AUG 2004

Ulfa's last stand?

Or Gogoi's last hurrah? 9/8/04

Dispur's failure to counter Ulfa's growing belligerency has in August alone cost 19 lives — 15 civilians, four of them children, and four security force personnel. Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi's ineffectiveness is apparent from the daily blood-bath and Assam's descending to the status of Kashmir. If Dhemaji's Independence Day carnage — 13 dead — the 26 August serial blasts that killed five and subversive activities are not enough for genuine alarm and firm action, Gogoi may have to hit the door running. He is seen to be acting tough but his reaction to the latest blasts was, to say the least, regrettable. On television, he sounded disillusioned — and his remark that the "Ulfa has waged a war against the people, what is their purpose?" exposed his ignorance of militant machinations. Also irrelevant was his reference to the 1983 Nellie and Gohpur massacre of Bangladeshi immigrants during the Assam students' anti-foreigners agitation which, in a sense supported Ulfa self-styled commander-in-chief Paresh Barua's recent diatribe about Aasu having no moral right to criticise the Dhemaji incident since it had been part of that carnage.

Ulfa is a problem that all parties must strengthen the Congress administration to tackle and overcome. Gogoi's proposal for a joint command to coordinate operations is not new; when it was mooted in the 1990s not all the seven states were interested. But given that the Ulfa has suddenly changed tack to hit soft targets a la "Islamic terrorists", the proposal warrants attention. Meanwhile, all MPs from the North-east must persist with their demand for political dialogue. So how much longer will Dispur wait to crack the whip?

CENTRE MULLS ECONOMIC PACKAGE TO MAKE STATE FEEL AT HOME

New push for Manipur peace

Abhigyan Hans in New Delhi

Aug. 29. — As part of the ground work for initiating "unconditional talks" with "everyone", including insurgent groups operating in Manipur, Union home minister Mr Shivraj Patil is likely to announce a fresh economic package for the people of the region during his three-day trip to the North-east. However, the Centre's stand against the lifting of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act may act a stumbling block for the Centre's peace initiative in Manipur.

Senior officials assessing the unrest in Manipur believe if the

undertaken. "Besides the high-handedness of the armed forces there, the local people's frustration and alienation over the years due to the lack of development and employment opportunities has found voice in the present agitation (against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act). An economic package will go a long way in soothing tempers," an official said.

Sources, however, concede that addressing the economic needs of Manipur is only one of the aspects and that the government needs to undertake various other confidence-building measures in a bid to resolve the complex, decades-old Manipur tangle.

But what about the 'backlogs'?

NEW DELHI, Aug. 29. — As for the economic package, the less said the better. Expressing "disappointment" over the failure of the government in meeting the "very basic, immediate and foremost need" of the north-eastern region, a Parliamentary panel had recently played the Planning Commission and the Union finance ministry for their "indifferent attitude" while releasing funds.

The Committee expresses its concern at the indifferent attitude of the Planning Commission and the finance ministry and also for not paying any attention to the recommendation of this Committee to release the backlog amount of Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR), the Standing Committee on Home Affairs said in its report tabled in Parliament recently. — SNS

government took fresh initiatives to ensure development of the region as well as for providing employment avenues to the local youth, the current public anger — which spilled into the streets there following the alleged rape and killing of a 31-year-old suspected PLA activist Manorma Devi — could be contained to a considerable extent, provided other confidence building measures are also

মণিপুরে সেই জওয়ানদের

ডি এন এ
পরীক্ষা হবে

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি ও
গুয়াহাটি, ২৯ অগস্ট: চাপের মুখে
পড়ে অবশেষে থাংজাম মনোরমাকে
ধর্ষণ ও হত্যার দায়ে অভিযুক্ত
জওয়ানদের ডি এন এ পরীক্ষার
সিদ্ধান্ত নিল প্রতিরক্ষা মন্ত্রক। আজ
মন্ত্রক সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে, মণিপুর
পুলিশকে যত শীঘ্র সম্ভব অভিযুক্তদের
রক্তের নমুনা নিতে বলা হয়েছে।
ফরেনসিক রিপোর্টে দেখা গিয়েছে,
নিহত মনোরমা দেবীর জামাকাপড়ে
রক্ত ও বীরের দাগ ছিল। অসম
রাইফেলসের ১৭ ব্যাটেলিয়নের
অভিযুক্ত চার জন হল, নায়েব সুবেদার
দিগধর দত্ত, হাবিলদার সুরেশ কুমার,
রাইফেলম্যান লোথা ও অজিত সিংহ।

মণিপুরে জঙ্গি সন্দেহে ধৃত
মনোরমা দেবীর হত্যাকাণ্ড নিয়ে
গণবিক্ষোভ উদ্ভাবন আকার ধারণ
করায় সেনাবাহিনীও অভিযুক্তদের
বিরুদ্ধে তদন্ত দ্রুত শেষ করতে
চাইছে। রাজ্য সরকারের গঠিত তদন্ত
কমিশনের পাশাপাশি বাহিনীর পক্ষ
থেকেও তদন্ত আদালত বসানো
হয়েছে। এর প্রধানই ইফল জেলা
পুলিশের সুপারকে চিঠি লিখে ডি এন
এ পরীক্ষা করানোর কথা বলেছেন।
মন্ত্রকের মুখপাত্র জানিয়েছেন,
“পরীক্ষা হলে দ্রুত ফয়সালা হবে এবং
তদন্ত-প্রক্রিয়ায় স্বচ্ছতা থাকবে।”

এখন ডি এন এ পরীক্ষায় রাজি
হলেও প্রথমদিকে সাক্ষ্য দিতেই অসম
রাইফেলস গড়িমসি করছিল।
বাহিনীর যুক্তি ছিল, নিরাপত্তার
অভাবেই তাদের পক্ষে কমিশনের
দফতরে যাওয়া সম্ভব নয়। আদালত
গ্রেফতারি পরোয়ানা জারির হুমকি
দেওয়ায় গতকাল অভিযুক্ত চার
জওয়ান প্রথম কমিশনের সামনে
উপস্থিত হয়। তার পর অবশ্য অসম
রাইফেলসের শীর্ষ স্তর থেকে
হাইকোর্টের কাছে বন্ধ ঘরে সাক্ষ্যের
সুযোগ দিতে অনুরোধ করা হয়। সেই
আজি মঞ্জুর হয়েছে। কাল ইফলের
কেন্দ্রীয় কারাগারের রুদ্ধদ্বার কক্ষে
অসম রাইফেলসের অভিযুক্ত চার
জওয়ানের শুনানি হবে। এই শুনানিতে
আইনজীবীরা ছাড়া মনোরমার মা ও
ডাইকেই শুধু থাকতে দেওয়া হবে।

Ulfa divided over dialogue

Cadres against attacks flee camps, surrender

Agencies
Guwahati, August 28

UNION MINISTER of State for Defence Bijoy Krishna Handique on Saturday claimed that the Ulfa leadership was divided over holding peace talks with the government.

"There is a widening rift, in fact a sharp division, within Ulfa's top brass, with one faction willing to hold talks with the government and the other opposed to and adopting a belligerent posture," the minister told.

Handique's statement comes in the wake of a spate of explosions in Assam blamed on Ulfa, a separatist guerrilla group fighting for an independent homeland since 1979.

"The division within Ulfa has created some problems for talks although the government of India is ready for negotiations and wants to end the militancy through the process of dialogue," Handique said.

Meanwhile, newspapers quoted Ulfa's self-styled commander-in-chief Paresh Baruah as saying that the outfit was ready for talks with New Delhi on the issue of sovereignty or independence. "Sovereignty is the core issue for us and we are willing to sit for dialogue anywhere if this is discussed," the Ulfa leader said.

The Ulfa has unleashed terror in Assam in the past fortnight triggering up to a dozen blasts and killing up to 22 people and wounding at least 100 in separate incidents, mostly targeting civilians. On August 15, Ulfa militants triggered a powerful landmine explosion in the eastern town of Dhemaji, killing 15 people, mostly students, during an Independence Day parade.

"The Ulfa is now using mercenaries and linkmen to carry out blasts on soft targets, including children and public property, due to dwindling cadre strength," said Anup S. Jamwal, general officer commanding the army's Four Corps engaged in counter-insurgency operations in Assam.

On Friday, 47 Ulfa cadres surrendered before army authorities with



An Ulfa militant surrenders his arms to an army official in Charidwar.

arms and ammunition. "Our leaders wanted us to strike terror across the state and instructed us to do whatever possible to create panic. A vast majority of us were totally against such indiscriminate attacks and so we decided to flee our camps and surrender before the authorities," said S. Das, an Ulfa cadre who surrendered.

Some 30 militant groups, including Ulfa, are waging insurgencies in the North-east seeking greater autonomy or independence. More than 10,000 people have lost their lives in Assam during the past two decades.

High alert in south Assam

High alert has been sounded in South Assam's Barak valley following reports that Islamic fundamentalist groups were planning a major strike in the area. "The district administra-

tion held several discussions with the army, police and para military forces to tighten security as the area has a long international border with neighbouring Bangladesh," Cachar Deputy Commissioner Sunanda Sengupta told here on Saturday.

Cop killed in shootout

Ulfa militants continued to indulge in stray incidents of violence, killing a policeman in a shootout and planting an explosive device on the railway track, which was detected by the police. Official sources said here today that one policeman was killed in an exchange of fire with Ulfa activists who lobbed a hand grenade at a police party led by Additional Superintendent of Police P.R. Kar at Saharikota under Moran police station of Dibrugarh district last night.

MEA officers bunk classes

Saurabh Shukla
New Delhi, August 28

THE FOREIGN Office's much-hyped virtual classroom for mid-career training for IFS officers lies in a state of virtual reality a month after it was launched by external affairs minister K. Natwar Singh.

The reason: a batch of IFS officers who have boycotted the classroom till the ministry provides them with computers at home and makes some changes in the programme. "It is stupid to expect us to do such a course online. It is an intensive six-month course with 12 hyperlinks. The government should provide us with computers," one of the IFS officers told HT.

The programme was started for two IFS batches - the junior batch (1992) is for those on their way to becoming directors and the senior batch (1985) is for directors on their way to becoming joint secretaries. While the senior batch has shown some interest, the junior batch is still up in arms.

Modeled on the lines of the mid-career programmes of the British Foreign Office and US State Department, these courses - conducted by the Foreign Office's training institute - are aimed at enhancing diplomatic skills. "These are two critical levels in an officer's career and the idea is to train them specifically on their new responsibilities. The '92 batch wants some changes and we are examining them," a senior official said.

A sore point with the juniors is that while the senior batch gets to attend an all expenses paid training exercise, they only get to log in.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 AUG 2000

Court rejects AR plea on custody death probe

9.11.88
23/8
9.11.88

HT Correspondent
Gwahati, August 28

GAUHATI HIGH Court on Saturday declined to stay the proceedings of the C. Upendra judicial commission set up by the Manipur government to probe the killing of Thangjam Manorama in the custody of the Assam Rifles on July 11.

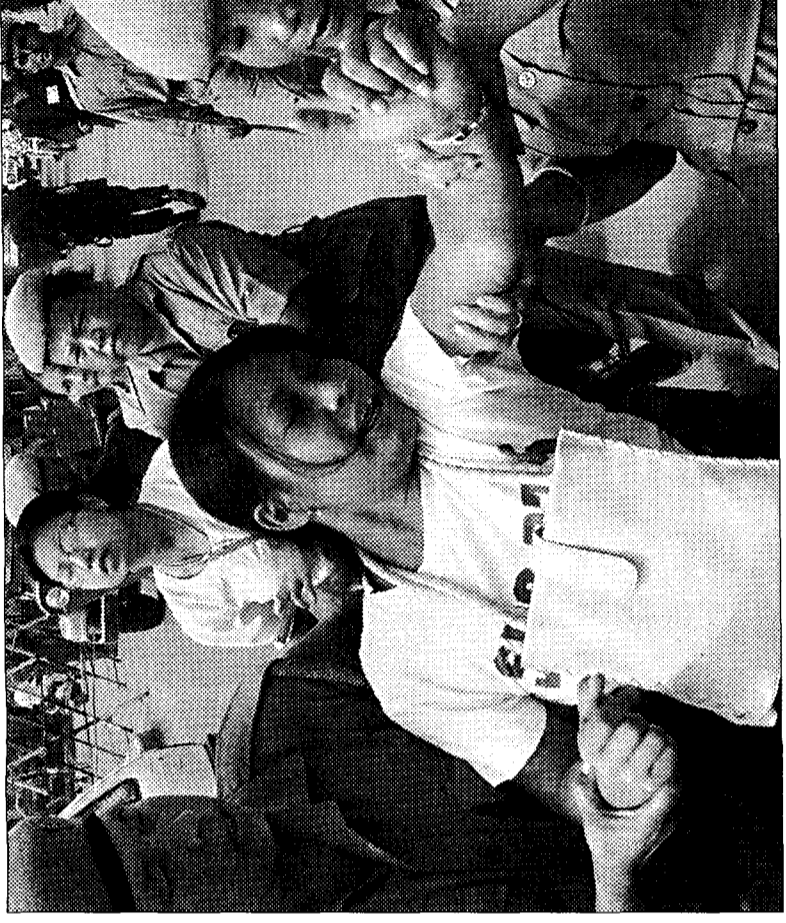
The high court order coincided with the appearance of the four AR men — Digambar Dutt, Suresh Kumar, T. Lotha and Ajit Singh — before the Justice Upendra commission for a hearing at Imphal's State Guest House around 11 am.

The court directed the commission to shift its venue to Imphal Central Jail minutes after it began the day's proceedings. After recording counsel for Assam Rifles personnel Col. Triveni Prasad and counsel for Manorama's family Lakhi Kanta Singh told the commission that Gauhati High Court — following a writ petition — had ordered the shifting of the commission's venue.

The AR had moved the high court challenging the constitution of the judicial commission, itself, and seeking stay on its proceedings. Justice P.G. Agarwala, in his order, said the commission would carry on with its proceedings but restrained it from publishing its report until the AR petition was disposed of. The order further said that the findings of the



The accused Assam Rifles personnel leave the state guest house in Imphal. (Right) Police arrest students protesting in front of the Chief Minister's residence in Imphal on Saturday.



PTI

The accused Assam Rifles personnel leave the state guest house in Imphal. (Right) Police arrest students protesting in front of the Chief Minister's residence in Imphal on Saturday.

commission would be subjected to the high court's judgment on the AR petition. The 32-year-old Manorama death, allegedly by the Assam Rifles personnel, triggered an often-violent agitation against the 'draconian' Armed Forces Special Powers Act — it practically gives soldiers a licence to kill — forcing the Congress-led coalition government headed by Okram Ibobi Singh to set up the Upendra commission.

Counsel for Col. Jagmohan, commandant of AR's 17th battalion, argued that AFSPA before proceeding against the AR personnel. Lawyers appearing for the Manipur government argued that the commission was just a fact-finding body and the question of obtain-

ing the sanction from the Centre did not arise. The Upendra commission had issued summons to Col. Jagmohan and the four courtiers. Though the high court temporarily exempted Col. Jagmohan from appearing before the commission, the other four were told to appear for a hearing.

The AR men's counsel had cited security reasons for their failure to appear before the commission, and had requested the commission to hold its proceedings in-camera within the Kangla Fort, where the Assam Rifles is stationed. The commission turned down the request but agreed to hold the proceedings in-camera at the Guest House. It had also asked the

Manipur DGP to issue bailable arrest warrants against the accused quartet if they failed to turn up by August 30. The AR quartet finally appeared before the commission on Saturday. However, as per the Gauhati high court order, the commission would now have to examine them within the high-security Central Jail in Imphal.

MLAs' restraint plea to agitators

SEVEN RULING Manipuri legislators, including two ministers, on Saturday came forward to urge the 32 organisations spearheading the stir to press for lifting of the AFSPA, to exercise restraint and hold talks with the government, even as several students were arrested for defying prohibitory orders.

Several students, were briefly taken into custody for attempting to hand over textbooks by defying prohibitory orders as part of the stir, to Governor S.S. Sijdhua, Chief Minister Ibobi Singh.

Several students were also arrested from far-flung Lamtai and Wabagai in Imphal East and Imphal West districts. The exact number was not known, but the officials estimated it to be below 100.

Meanwhile, the legislators, in a statement, urged the 32 organisations to hold parleys with the government to restore normality in the state in the interests of students and the general masses.

Assam Rifles men appear before probe panel

By Iboyalma Lalthangbam

IMPHAL, AUG. 28. The four accused Assam Rifles personnel today appeared before the Manorama Death Inquiry Commission here, after avoiding appearance before it five times. The Chairman of the Commission and retired District and Sessions Court Judge, C. Upendra, had made it clear that if the personnel — accused of raping and killing Thangjam Manorama — failed to appear by 10.45 a.m. today arrest warrants issued against them would be executed.

Though the Director-General of Police, Manipur, had been directed to arrest them, the order was kept in abeyance on the basis of the assurance given to the Commission by the Assam Rifles counsel, Triveni Prasad.

At 10.30 a.m. today, Mr. Prasad appeared before the Commission and produced some fax messages from another counsel of the Assam Rifles in Guwahati pleading in the High Court there for setting aside the Upendra Commission on the ground that the Manipur Government had not obtained the prior permission of the Centre before setting it up and that the State Government had no authority to probe the activities of the security



ACT AGAINST ACT: College students being arrested in front of the Manipur Chief Minister's residence in Imphal on Saturday when they were protesting against the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. — PTI

forces engaged in maintaining law and order.

Plea to hold back probe

Mr. Prasad handed over the fax messages to the Chairman and requested him to hold back the probe since the matter would be heard by the High Court. But counsel for Manora-

ma's family said that it was merely a personal letter by the Assam Rifles counsel in Guwahati to his counterpart in Imphal and, as such, the Commission should not take judicial notice of the same.

Mr. Upendra ruled that under the circumstances he would go ahead with examining the accused. Thereafter, Mr. Prasad produced the accused personnel before the Commission.

Tight security

Apart from the security arrangements made by the DGP, Manipur, armed Assam Rifles men were deployed around the Commission premises.

The accused were brought in a bullet-proof jeep surrounded by armed personnel.

The Commission sent out reporters and lensmen since the hearing would be held in camera as per the Guwahati High Court order.

Brother identifies two

Thangjam Dorendra, younger brother of Manorama, today identified two of the four accused Assam Rifles personnel before the Commission.

Dorendra reportedly said he could identify two of them but as regards the other two he was not sure as it was dark when the incident took place.

Five killed in ULFA blasts

9-25-87 TIMES NEWS NETWORK (11-1)

Guwahati: Five people, including two BSF personnel and two minors, were killed and 61 others injured in a series of explosions carried out by ULFA in Assam.

One person was killed and eight others were injured in a grenade attack at a cinema hall in Dibrugarh on Wednesday night. The rebels also detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) on the railway tracks in Kokrajhar district on Wednesday night, and followed it with a bomb blast in the same district, inside a private bus at Gossaigaon on Thursday morning in which one person was killed.

Hours later, a bus carrying BSF personnel and their families from Tura to Guwahati hit an IED in Goalpara district resulting in the death of a sub-inspector, a girl child and the driver of the bus. Six other BSF personnel sustained injuries. The police said the BSF men and their families were proceeding on a holiday.

IGP (special branch) Khagen Sarma said ULFA carried out the series of blasts to divert the public attention away from the August 15 killings of 13 people in Dhemaji.

The blast at Gossaigaon ripped through a private bus travelling from Chapatgram to Alipur in West Bengal. According to the police, 37 people were injured in the blast. One of the injured later succumbed to his injuries in the hospital. Another bomb exploded at Tangla in Darrang district on Thursday afternoon. The police said that no one had been hurt in the explosion.

A caller identifying himself as ULFA's C-in-C Paresch Barua called up TOI office and owned responsibility for the incident at Goalpara district and the blast on the railway track. However, he denied the outfit's hand in the other two incidents at Gossaigaon and Dibrugarh.

মনোরমা কাণ্ডে বিপাকে অসম রাইফেলস

প্রভাত ঘোষ ● আগরতলা

২৬ অগস্ট: মণিপুরে আরও একবার বড় ধাক্কা খেল অসম রাইফেলস বাহিনী। গতকাল প্রথমে ফরেনসিক রিপোর্টে ধর্ষণের স্পষ্ট ইঙ্গিত, তারপরে আজ থাংজাম মনোরমার মৃত্যুর তদন্তে গঠিত কমিশন থেকে বাহিনীর চার অভিযুক্ত জওয়ানকে সাক্ষ্য দিতে ডাকার জন্য একেবারে গ্রেফতারি পরওয়ানা জারি। বিপদ বুঝে বাহিনীর কোঁসুলি কমিশনের প্রধানকে কাতর অনুরোধ করেন আগামিকাল দুপুর পর্যন্ত যাতে পরওয়ানা স্থগিত রাখা হয়।

গত ১১ জুলাই ইরিলবুং থানা এলাকা থেকে মনোরমার গুলিবিদ্ধ মৃতদেহ পাওয়া যায়। মৃত্যুর আগে থাংজাম মনোরমাকে যে ধর্ষণ করা হয়েছিল, ফরেনসিকে পরীক্ষায় তার স্পষ্ট প্রমাণ মিলেছে। সরকারি তদন্ত কমিশনের প্রধান সি উপেন্দ্র সিংহ আজ ছয় পাতার রিপোর্টটি পেয়েই গৌহাটি হাইকোর্টে তার কিছু অংশ পড়ে শোনান। যেখানে বলা হয়েছে, “মনোরমার অন্তর্বাসে এবং শরীরের অভ্যন্তরে শুক্রাণু মিশ্রিত রক্ত পাওয়া গিয়েছে। মৃত্যুর আগে তাঁর সঙ্গে যৌন মিলন বা তাঁকে ধর্ষণের নিশ্চিত প্রমাণ রয়েছে।” কলকাতার সেন্ট্রাল ফরেনসিক সায়েন্স ল্যাবরেটরি এই রিপোর্ট দিয়েছে। ওই ঘটনার প্রতিবাদে বেশ কিছুদিন ধরে ৩২টি স্বেচ্ছাসেবী

সংগঠন মণিপুরে আন্দোলন চালাচ্ছে। আন্দোল একেবারে সামনের সারিতে রয়েছেন মণিপুর নারীরা। তাঁদের সরাসরি অভিযোগ ছিল, ৩২ বছরের মনোরমাকে ধর্ষণ করে খুন করেছে অসম রাইফেলসের জওয়ানরা। উপেন্দ্র বলেন, রিপোর্টের প্রত্যয়িত নকল ইরিলবুং থানার ওসি এস গুণীন্দ্র সিংহের হাতে জমা দেওয়া হবে। তদন্তে আগেই প্রকাশ, ছ’টি গুলি করা হয়েছিল শুধু মনোরমার গোপনাঙ্গেই। ধর্ষণের প্রমাণ লোপের চেষ্ঠাই তার সম্ভাব্য কারণ বলে অনুমান করা হচ্ছিল। ফরেনসিক রিপোর্ট সেই সন্দেহকেও আরও মজবুত করল।

এই অবস্থায় কমিশনের সামনে যাতে হাজির না-হতে হয় তার জন্য অসম রাইফেলস আশ্রয় চেষ্ঠা করেছে। কাল চতুর্থবারের জন্য জওয়ানদের সাক্ষ্য দিতে ডাকা হলেও কেউই আসেননি। কমিশনের প্রধান, অবসরপ্রাপ্ত বিচারপতি উপেন্দ্র কালই জানান ২৬ তারিখের শুনানিতে জওয়ানদের হাজির করাতে তিনি কঠোর ব্যবস্থা নেবেন। আজ শুনানির সময় নির্দিষ্ট ছিল দুপুর ১টা। দেড়টা অবধি তিনি ইফলের সরকারি অতিথিশালায় কমিশনের দফতরে অপেক্ষা করেন। তারপরে আধাসামরিক বাহিনীর চার জওয়ান নায়েক সুবেদার দিগম্বর দৎ, হাবিলদার সুরেশ কুমার ও দু’জন রাইফেলম্যান টি লোথা এবং অজিত সিংহের নামে গ্রেফতারি পরওয়ানা জারি করেন। এই

পরওয়ানা অবশ্য জামিনযোগ্য। বাহিনীর তরফে কোঁসুলি কর্নেল ত্রিবেদী প্রসাদ সারাঙ্কণই কমিশনে উপস্থিত ছিলেন। তিনি ২৪ ঘণ্টা সময় চেয়ে জানান যে করে হোক আগামিকাল চারজনকে কমিশনের সামনে হাজির করানো হবেই। কোঁসুলির আবেদনে সাড়া দিয়ে উপেন্দ্র আগামিকাল দুপুর দেড়টা অবধি পরওয়ানা স্থগিত রাখেন।

আজ বিকালে উপেন্দ্র তাঁর ক্ষোভ জানিয়ে বলেন, “আইনসঙ্গত যুক্তি ছাড়াই অসম রাইফেলসের জওয়ানরা কমিশনকে এড়িয়ে যাওয়ার ধৃষ্টতা দেখিয়ে দ্বাসছে। ওদের বোঝা দরকার আমরা ছেলেমানুষ নই, এখানে ছেলেখেলাও করছি না।” তিনি আরও বলেন, “আমাকে জানানো হয়েছে, যে-মেয়েটির মৃত্যুর তদন্তে আধাসামরিক বাহিনী সহযোগিতা করছে না, তারা নিজেদের দফতরে কোর্ট অব ইনকোয়ারিতে ইতিমধ্যেই মেয়েটির দুই ভাই ও বোনকে জিজ্ঞাসাবাদ করেছে। তারা অভিযোগকারীদের সাক্ষ্য নিয়েও নিজেরা বারবার কমিশনকে এড়ানোর চেষ্ঠা করে আসলে দেশের আইনকেই হেয় করতে চাইছে।” এদিকে মণিপুরে ছাত্র সংগঠনগুলির বিক্ষোভ আন্দোলন অব্যাহত। আজ রাজধানীর রাস্তায় বিক্ষোভকারী অসুত ৮৬ জন ছাত্রছাত্রীকে গ্রেফতারও করা হয়। আগামী ৫ তারিখ দু’দিনের জন্য কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল মণিপুরে আসছেন।

AMADARAZAR DATEKA 27 AUG 2000

If stir stops, Act may go: Ibobi

Rahul Karmakar
Guwahati, August 24

IN WHAT could have repercussions in New Delhi, Manipur Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh told protesters on Tuesday that his coalition government would contemplate ridding the state of the much-hated Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA)

He had a condition, though: the protesters must restrain themselves and see how the partial removal of AFSPA works out.

Singh's desperate attempt to pacify the anti-AFSPA protesters, barely 24 hours before the expiry of a deadline set for all Manipur MLAs to resign, was aimed particularly at students who have vowed to surrender their textbooks by Wednesday if a decision to withdraw AFSPA from the state was not taken.

Incidentally, the results of the forensic test conducted posthumously on the 32-year-old Thangjam Manorama are supposed to be submitted to the C. Upendra Judicial Commission of inquiry on Wednesday.

The ongoing unrest in Manipur was triggered by the alleged custodial death of Manorama, said to be an underground PLA activist, on July 11. "Our (Secular Progressive Front) government is in favour of complete removal of AFSPA, but at the same time we want that all forms of violence



Manipur University students take their MA examination on Tuesday sporting black badges in protest against the government's failure to repeal the AFSPA.

Educational institutions shut down

THE MANIPUR government ordered all educational institutions to remain shut on Wednesday to pre-empt students from handing over their text books to the authorities, to protest the administration's failure to repeal the Armed Forces

Special Powers Act.

Earlier, Chief Minister O. Ibobi Singh had in a statement appealed to the students not to go ahead with their plan. He had also appealed to parents to convince their wards not to take the step.

PTI, Imphal

should be stopped," the chief minister said on Tuesday, appealing to both the protesters and the different militant outfits in the state.

Ibobi Singh, notably, had announced partial withdrawal of AFSPA on August 12 following a month of intense agitation against the Act.

The Apunba Lup, the core body of 32 organisations leading the protest, rejected his offer outright demanding lifting of the Act from

the entire state.

The UPA government at the Centre adopted a "wait and watch policy" in response to Singh's idea of partial relaxation of AFSPA from the Imphal municipal area.

Meanwhile, incidents of sporadic violence have been reported from the streets of Imphal and beyond on Tuesday as protesters burnt more Indian national flags and copies of the Constitution to register their protest.

Bent brotherhood

Ulfa fast losing friends and sympathisers

Ulfa is hoist with its own petard. Killing of 13 people, 10 of them schoolchildren, at Dhemaji on Independence Day has shocked even its staunchest supporters and invited widespread condemnation. In what is significant, following this cold blooded act, a senior Aasu leader said his party neither subscribed to the Ulfa demand for "Swadhin Asom" nor supported its "armed struggle". In what could be a turning point in relations between the two outfits, self-styled Ulfa commander-in-chief Paresh Barua took umbrage and retorted that since Aasu was involved in massacring a large number of Bangladeshi immigrants at Nellie in 1983, it had no moral right to criticise the Ulfa. Aasu also expressed its displeasure by shutting off life for a day. Ulfa's misconception that killing and mayhem will return it to centre stage is costing it friends all round and it must rethink strategy. Its relationship with the AGP is far from cordial. In a sense, the Ulfa lost face in 1997 after it abducted and killed social worker Sanjay Ghosh and forced the closure of his NGO that was constructing a Majuli island dyke to stave off erosions. Nor has the Ulfa threat deterred the electorate from exercising their franchise.

If Ulfa's hardcore leaders have the people's welfare at heart, they must surrender. Chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa is said to have mellowed but he is still unpredictable given the Catch-22 situation in which he finds himself. It is Paresh Barua who wields the gun and leans heavily on foreign agencies inimical to India for material support. He is turning insurgency into terrorism. Ulfa has degenerated into a band of criminals and robbers. Dhemaji may not be the end of the road, but every drop of blood it spills weakens Ulfa's commitment to "Swadhim Asom". Its murderous agenda leaves little scope for a political solution. Perhaps the Centre will have to think in terms of another Operation Rhino to deflect the political interference.

House quit cry in Manipur

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Imphal, Aug. 22: The group of 32 organisations spearheading the agitation against the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in Manipur today asked all legislators from the state to resign by August 25 or face social boycott.

After more than a month of turmoil over the demand for lifting the act, the twin districts of Imphal today remained unusually calm without any violent protest during the curfew-relaxation hours.

But the undercurrent of tension was evident as the Apunba Lup, the group spearheading the movement, set the August 25 deadline for all the 59 MLAs and three MPs to step down for "failing to act together for scrapping the draconian legislation".

The Okram Ibobi Singh cabinet had removed the "disturbed areas" tag that gives the security forces sweeping powers from the Imphal municipal limit on August 12 without approval from Delhi. However, this "bold" step failed to pacify the protesters.

Pebam Chittaranjan, a student activist, committed self-immolation on Independence Day, stoking the embers further. Chittaranjan was symbolically cremated

by his family members yesterday, after his body was cremated by the state authority as unclaimed on August 17.

With yesterday's cremation, the general strike called by the Apunba Lup came to an end. However, the protesters are gearing up for a more intensified agitation.

The Manipur Forward Youth Front demanded today that the Assembly be convened within 48 hours to take a resolution to withdraw the act from the whole state.

The Political Parties Forum, Manipur, an umbrella organisation of all Opposition parties, today urged Delhi to initiate a political dialogue with underground organisations to find a solution to the decade-old problem of insurgency in the state.

"As a goodwill gesture and also to pave the way for holding peace talks, Delhi should declare a unilateral ceasefire with all the militant organisations of Manipur," forum convener and former deputy chief minister Leishangthem Chandramani Singh told the media today.

Official sources said the curfew was relaxed from 4 am to 9 pm in the twin districts today.

As Imphal remained calm, hundreds of protesters gathered at the Wabagai Higher Secondary School in Thoubal district.



RAJKUMAR MANISANA, a descendant of the Manipur king, is the supreme commander of the UFO. He is known as *thengkorou* or ultimate warrior. His followers believe he has magical powers, including the ability to vanish into thin air

MANIPUR'S BOXER ARMY



IMAGING ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Manipur's last king had formed a fighting unit of martial artistes to battle the British. That unit has now resurfaced to fight India

Rahul Karmakar
Imphal

THE YEAR is 1937. Maharaja Bodhachandra of Manipur has some of his most trusted subjects form an elite group of warriors. They are *thang ta* experts. *Thang ta* is the traditional Manipuri martial art involving swords (*thang*) and spears (*ta*).

The 35-member group calling itself the Scientific Defence Cultural Society, or Satjal in the local parlance, promptly goes on a recruitment drive with one objective — driving the British out of the Manipuri kingdom that purportedly extended up to the Brahmaputra river in the west and Burma's Chindwin river in the east. On the surface, Satjal's aim is to preserve and promote

the indigenous martial art.

The British lose no time in banning the potentially dangerous Satjal and hunting down its leaders. Most take cover in the Chin Hills of Burma (now Myanmar), occasionally carrying out raids on occupational enemies of the king. They return only in 1947 after the British restore Manipur to Maharaja Bodhachandra on August 14 that year.

Royal adherents as they are, the Satjal members extend their support to their king but decide to lie low as Manipur, armed with a Constitution that predates the Constitution of India, begins enjoying freedom under the democratically elected premier MK Priyabrata with the Maharaja as the titular head.

On 15 October 1949, an agreement sees Manipur being merged with the

Indian Union. Soon after, the Satjal transforms itself into a cult of brotherhood, each member sworn by a code of secrecy. Over the years the members are relegated to the Manipuri subconscious, but the band of brothers — and sisters too — expand across Meitei settlements in the Northeast, and the membership swells to 3 lakh across 37 battalions.

Circa 2004, Manipur boils following the alleged custodial death of 32-year-old Thangiam Manorama, who the Assam Rifles claim was a member of the underground People's Liberation Army. Manorama's death on July 11 triggers mass protests, often violent, against a "draconian" law called the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).

Amid the turmoil, the Satjal resurfaces in its new avatar as the

Universal Friendship Organisation (UFO). Some 5,000 members dressed in black and sporting a ponytail and beard assemble in an elevated glade at Chingnungkok to celebrate the Manipuri Independence Day 24 hours ahead of the 'Indian I-Day'. Chingnungkok, 20 km from capital Imphal, is the UFO's headquarters.

It is the first time in over 65 years of its existence that the Shaolin-like regimented UFO decides to make itself heard riding the anti-AFSPA wave. Its supreme Rajkumar Manisana, a royal descendant, had in fact raised his voice a few weeks back by serving legal notices to New Delhi and the United Kingdom from Beijing, challenging Manipur's merger with the Indian Union. He followed it up with a petition to the International Court of Justice at The Hague.

Manisana, the grandson of Satjal's founder, is clear about the UFO objective — a free Manipur, democratic but under a monarch, that enjoys cordial relationship with India. "The merger of Manipur was unacceptable as it was done without the consent of the indigenous people, the reason why we celebrate our own Independence Day," says the 65-year-old Manisana, revered as the *thengkorou* (ultimate warrior). He insists that "our activists do not believe in violence and do not carry any arms", but "are firm about regaining the lost right of self-determination".

His battalion commanders and warriors stand at attention as Manisana hoists the UFO's golden dragon-inscribed maroon flag — somewhat resembling the royal pennant of the erstwhile Manipuri kingdom.

A few military exercises follow, but there is no demonstration of *thang ta*, the art of self-defence the men are trained in.

"Their martial skill is not for public consumption, but it would suffice to say that each UFO member has to practice four hours a day," UFO commander Sharat Singh says. There are apparently no restrictions in Meiteis joining the organisation — anyone can sign up; new entrants are tested by their ability to keep their lips sealed.

There are tales in Manipur how various militant outfits have tried in vain to penetrate the UFO as have the intelligence agencies. "Imagine what damage such a group, about which there is very little inside information, can do if it takes up arms," says a top police officer.

GREATER GARBAGE

Meghalaya must stand strong

THE low key demand for Greater Garoland since 1992 now gains stridency with involvement of the militant A'chik National Volunteers Council. And this after the outfit signed a ceasefire accord with the UPA. The motive behind the truce, it would appear, is to press for official and political acceptance of its demand that seeks to include parts of the west Khasi hills, Assam's Goalpara district and even Bangladesh — a tall order that deserves short shrift. There is no reason why Khasis and Garos cannot live in peace since there is no known enmity between them. Admittedly Garos are educationally and economically backward, but there is no discrimination against them. In the 60-member assembly, they have 24 reserved seats and, like the Khasis, enjoy 40 per cent job reservations. Since attaining statehood in 1972, most Meghalaya chief ministers have been Garos. Khasis acknowledge the late Garo leader Captain Williamson Sangma's contributions to the statehood movement.

Now that the ANVC is obliged to honour the ceasefire, it must exercise restraint to ensure continuity. Its ban on circulation of the Meghalaya Guardian in the Garo Hills is uncalled for and violates the terms of the truce. Having won public support, the outfit must also learn to accept criticism. Intimidation of the press serves no purpose and problems must be thrashed out amicably. The DD Lapang government must ensure the truce works to the state's advantage and persuade the Khasi extremist group — Hinniewtrep A'chik Liberation Council — to come to terms. Already there are signs of a hundred cadres surrendering. When peace returns, Meghalaya could cash in on its tourism potential.

THE STATESMAN

22 AUG 2004

Manipur varsity raid: Ultra held, arms found

SNS & PTI

IMPHAL, Aug. 21. — The Manipur police arrested a militant and seized an AK 56 rifle, two magazines and 25 live rounds during a raid at the Manipur University hostel, a senior police official said.

The rebel, Heikham Chinglemba, an activist of the banned People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak, was arrested and a revolver and four rounds seized from him during a search at Wangkhei Ningthem-pukhri area here late last night, SP (Imphal East) Mr Kh. Chandramani Singh said.

Interrogation of the militant led to the recovery of the arms at the university boys' hostel at Canchipur, 6 km from here. A booklet entitled *A brief account for demanding sovereignty of Manipur* written by Revolutionary People's Front, the political wing of the separatist People's Liberation Army, was found from the boys hostel room no 118 occupied by one Chandam Jiten Singh (22), who was not present when the raid was made at 5 a.m. the police officer said.

This was the first time that such a massive search was made on the Manipur university campus.

Manipur bandh called off

The indefinite bandh which had crippled normal life in Manipur for the past five days was called off today. This followed the "funeral" of student leader Pebam Chitaranjan using a *pangong* (a kind of wood used to replace bodies which have either disappeared or not recovered) by his family.

Pebam had self-immolated on 15 August to protest against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. He died the following day due to



Women protesters burn Indian goods to demand repeal of the AFSP Act. In Imphal on Saturday. — PTI

burn injuries. His unclaimed body was cremated by police on 18 August. However, Pebam's family refused to recognise the cremation and chose to cremate him using the *pangong*.

Police and para-military forces put up barricades and stood guard on all arterial roads to prevent thousands of agitators who had threatened to take to the streets for the "funeral". Chitaranjan's death had triggered the indefinite bandh call by the 32 organisations spearheading the agitation for removal of the Act. A short procession was also taken out from his residence to the cremation ground by mourners carrying placards and festoons demanding removal of the Act.

The 32 organisations, while announcing the lifting of the bandh,

said that the agitation would be stepped up soon.

Sources said the number of persons detained under the National Security Act had gone up to 32 after the arrest and detention of 12 persons, including nine women, yesterday.

In contrast, Saparmeina in Senapati district saw about 300 protesters demanding continuance of the AFSP Act in the state, official reports said. However, leaders of the procession said they were forced by Assam Rifles personnel posted at Saparmeina area, about 35 km from here, to take out the procession.

MP's outhouse set afire: Unidentified persons set fire to the outhouse of the residence of Manipur MP Mr Meinya Singh and a government office in Manipur, official sources said today.

CPM ditches CPI, lends support to Armed Forces Act

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 20 AUGUST

THE CPM, a diehard opponent of strong laws, on Friday came out in support of the controversial Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). Differing with the CPI, which wants the Act to go, the CPM said extraordinary laws are needed to tackle extraordinary situations.

The party has been opposing Pota on the ground that ordinary laws can tackle terrorism. CPM members, in their interventions in Parliament, have been critical of strong laws and even forced the ruling party to pledge its support for the repeal of Pota.

Its support for AFSPA — much harsher than Pota — is obviously prompted by the assessment of the CPM-led Tripura government, that stringent laws are needed for tackling insurgency.

The CPM's support for AFSPA cannot but be distressing for its supporters in the Left-liberal establishment. For, this section holds the AFSPA as a "draconian" legislation. Under this Act, all security forces are given unrestricted

powers to carry out operations once an area is declared disturbed. Even a non-commissioned officer is granted the right to shoot for maintaining public order. It was first applied to the northeastern states of Assam and Manipur and amended in 1972 to be extended to all seven states in the North East.

At a press conference here, CPM leaders said the Act should remain operational in intensely disturbed areas. This stand of the CPM is in conflict with the position of the CPI. The CPI, which had been demanding removal of the Act ever since violence began in Manipur, has welcomed the partial lifting of the Act. Meanwhile, the CPI on Friday asked the Centre not to impose President's Rule in Manipur.

Manipur gets extra time to tide over crisis

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 20 AUGUST

THE situation in Manipur continues to be grim. But to give the Okram Ibobi Singh government a breather of sorts, Union home minister Shivraj Patil said on Thursday the Centre would give the Manipur government "some more opportunity and time to set things right." Mr Patil ruled out any immediate plans to impose President's Rule in Manipur. He, however, conceded that unrest continued despite the state government's withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act from Imphal. "There are other options provided for in the Constitution," he said.

Though the Centre as well as the Congress top brass here are contemplating invoking Article 356 in the northeastern state, they are aware of the associated risks. In the first place, dismissal of the Ibobi Singh government could embitter a section of the state Congress unit and, second, there is no guarantee that the situation will improve. As for the option of a change in state leadership, a replacement for Mr Singh would be hard to come in these times of crisis.

Perhaps this quandary explains why the Centre is delaying its action. Mr Patil said: "We are watching what the elected government is doing there... but if the situation continues to be difficult or worsens further, we will take necessary action." Renewing the government's commitment to hold talks with "all insurgent groups willing to talk to us," Mr Patil hinted that some people in Manipur, including former chief ministers, were in favour of discussions being started.



PATIL: MANI(PUR) MATTERS

The Economic Times

The Economic Times

1 AUG 2004

10-1
19/8

A close watch on North-East: Patil

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 18. The Government today reiterated its willingness to hold talks with political parties and sections of the people in Manipur as part of its efforts to find an amicable solution to the continuing unrest there. Briefing members of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and some supporting parties late today, the Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, said that the Centre was keeping a close watch on the situation in all the North-Eastern States, including Manipur.

The meeting was presided over by the UPA chairperson, Sonia Gandhi, and attended by the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, senior Ministers and almost all the leaders of the parties that are part of the UPA.

CPI(M) stays away

A significant feature was that despite being invited, the Communist Party of India (M), the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the Forward Bloc stayed away, while the CPI participated in the meeting.

Briefing presspersons after the three-hour meeting, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Ghulam Nabi Azad, said that detailed discussions were held on a range of issues, including

Manipur, the situation in Jammu and Kashmir and the measures taken by the Government to deal with the situation obtaining out of the rise in the prices of petroleum products in the international market. The UPA members also expressed concern at the rise in inflation and were assured by the Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, that the Government was doing all that was necessary to control the situation.

Mr. Patil apprised them of the law and order situation in Manipur and expressed grave concern at the failure of the civil administration in the State. There was no shortage of funds for the development of the North-East and as much as Rs. 3,000 crores was lying in the non-lapsable pool. The CPI leaders, A.B. Bardhan and D.

Raja, cautioned the Government against doing anything that would alienate the people.

On Jammu and Kashmir, Mr. Patil said the Government had decided to continue the dialogue with all groups and individuals in consultation with the democratically-elected representatives. There had been a fall in the incidents of infiltration from across the border and one of the reasons for this was the near-completion of fencing along the Line of Control.

More steps on oil prices

Mr. Chidambaram assured them that the Government was ready to take "further steps" to keep the oil prices in check despite the spiralling international prices of crude.

The meeting was informed that the bill to repeal the POTA

would be moved in Parliament during the current session.

CPI sources indicated that the decision of the CPI(M), the RSP and the Forward Bloc not to attend the meeting was surprising.

According to a senior CPI leader, two days ago all the Left parties decided to attend the meeting. "We were surprised to get a call this afternoon saying that the decision had been changed," he said.

The CPI(M) said that it had decided to stay away in view of the fact that it was not part of the UPA and there was no agenda for the meeting.

"We will say whatever we have to say at the meeting of the Coordination Committee of the UPA and the Left parties," said the CPI(M) general secretary, Harkishan Singh Surjeet.

21 leaders held in Manipur

Statesman News Service

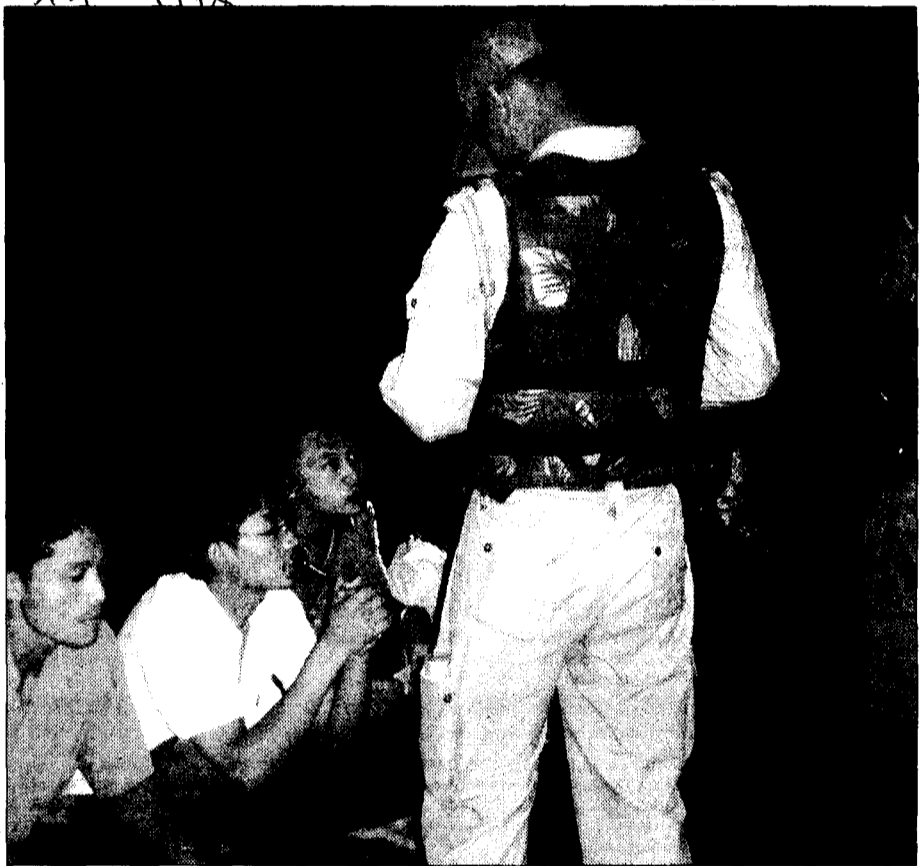
IMPHAL, Aug. 18. — At least 21 leaders of the agitating organisations have been arrested even as the stand-off between Apunba Lup, the umbrella body of 32 organisations, and the state government continue for second day over the funeral procession route of Pebam Chittaranjan who committed suicide to protest the Armed Forces Special Powers Act.

With the government adamant on not allowing the procession to be taken out as wanted by the organisations, the body of Chittaranjan remain unclaimed and the statewide general strike continued.

Protesters and Chittaranjan's family members wanted the body to be taken to Bishnupur, where the deceased lived the last part of his life and also committed self immolation, and then bring it back to Imphal to be cremated at Takhel Leikai, where he was born. But the state government wanted the body to be cremated either at Bishnupur or Takhel Leikai. The government also disallowed taking the body to and fro. Apunba Lup, however, stuck to its demand, refusing to take the body. The Lup also called a statewide strike till the body is cremated.

With solution not in sight, the government has started cracking down on the leaders of the protesters, arresting at least 21 of them in a series of raids. Those arrested include 8 women who had participated in the "nude protest" in front of Kangla Fort on 15 July.

With the government hardening its stance on the issue of lifting the Act, police conducted a series of raids in both Imphal East and West districts. Two of the 21 arrested in the raids were picked up from Imphal East while others were



Rounding up youths during a crackdown on agitators in Imphal on Wednesday. — Eastern Projections

picked up from the West district.

Shops and other business establishments remain closed today and commercial vehicles stayed off the road due to the general strike. Strike supporters came out at several areas and blocked roads with stone boulders. At least 10 people, including two minors were reportedly injured in police action in different places.

Apunba Lup has castigated the statement of Union home minister Mr Shivraj Patil on the Manipur situation in Parliament yesterday. A spokesperson of the Lup asked if the state government's duty, as mentioned by Mr Patil, was to serve the dictates of the Central government. Suppression of democratic demands and denial of democratic rights are not acts of patriotism, he added.

The army is still in Manipur owing to a failure of governance

18
19/8

Indefinitely in force

V.R. RAGHAVAN

The people of Manipur are angry, resentful and disillusioned with the price they have had to pay in the name of security. They have endured tough laws that restrict their rights as citizens in a democratic country. Their experience of security provided by the state has been abysmal. Manipuris have borne the brunt of violence from secessionist militants who obey no laws and from the state's coercive apparatus. In addition to armed violence, they have been inflicted with insidious violence in the form of corruption, misgovernance and venal politics. The situation was ripe for one ghastly incident of excessive and mindless action to happen. The alleged deliberate killing of a Manipuri woman by Assam Rifles personnel provided the spark for an unprecedented public response.

Public outrage in Manipur has manifested itself in the form of a demand for the revocation of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. The powers which the act invests on the armed forces in disturbed areas are well known. They have been described as draconian, against the tenets of human rights, and excessive. It is felt that the AFSPA is the cause of all problems in Manipur. Consequently, its revocation is perceived to be the solution to the current situation in the state. In the face of widespread people's anger, the government of Manipur has withdrawn the act from the municipal limits of Imphal. The reality in Manipur is, however, different. The revocation of the act will not only not solve the difficulties of Manipur's people, but will in fact worsen their daily life.

In the absence of the AFSPA, the army will not be able to conduct its operations against militants who have terrorized the population for decades. The territory of Manipur is under contention by the National Socialist Council of Nagalim, and is under negotiation with New



Delhi. If its main demand for a greater Nagaland including parts of Manipur are not met, the possibility of a terrorist campaign cannot be ruled out. There are other terrorist and militant groups operating in Manipur whose writ will run wild without the army's continuing operations. The violence such groups will unleash will be beyond the capability of the state-armed police and Manipur Rifles. When such groups start fighting each other, civil war conditions will prevail and no part of Manipur would be safe.

The AFSPA was applied in Manipur more than two decades ago. It was done at a time when violence in its most chaotic form prevailed in the state. That it continues for so long is the requirement of the political leadership of Manipur. Irrespective of the party which ruled from Imphal, every ruling political leadership wanted the army to be present in the state and therefore wanted the AFSPA to continue. The army on its part had recommended to the ministry of defence and the cabinet a number of times that it

‘ The army would be quite happy to be relieved of security responsibilities and go out of Manipur ’

should be disengaged from the state. Political choices ensured the army's permanent presence.

The army came into Manipur in conditions of extreme insecurity. It was brought in to eliminate and root out militant groups from their strongholds, stop them from forcibly extorting money, recruiting men and women against the popular will. Army operations have by necessity to be violent and forceful. Such intense operations cannot also be conducted indefinitely. Indeed, they should be conducted over specific areas and for short periods. The purpose of such operations is to eliminate the hardcore militants and to create conditions in which

negotiations can be conducted between the government and militant organizations.

The violent and forceful operations the army conducts cannot be constrained by the normal laws that apply to police forces. Armed forces are in need of legal protection when they are asked by the government to carry out full-scale operations against armed militant groups. The AFSPA provides that protection. It is not a sanction to kill indiscriminately. As in the case of Monorama, if misuse of the act takes place, deterrent penal action must be taken against the guilty.

The real problem in Manipur is not the excessive powers which the act provides. The real problem is of keeping the act in place indefinitely, and asking the army to conduct full-force operations indefinitely. The army would be quite happy to be relieved of security responsibilities and go out of Manipur. In that case, there would be no need for the AFSPA. The real issue is of security choices made by the political leadership. It cannot let go of the army, and the latter's presence requires the AFSPA.

The people of Manipur are articulate and aware of these issues. Manipuris have had the longest experience of the military since the Allied Armies used the area for recapturing Burma from the Japanese. The issue therefore is not of the AFSPA or the behaviour of the army. The army cannot and must not tolerate gross abuse of powers by its men and officers. Equally, the political leadership must not also seek the permanent presence of the army without the AFSPA.

It is strange to see the political unconcern in Manipur and in the other north-eastern states about the permanent presence of the army on the streets for decades. In fact, such presence is an admission of the failure of governance. Of course, everybody knows how the army's presence is used or misused for electoral and political gains. That flawed political choice, and not the AFSPA is the real issue in Manipur. To continue to argue against the AFSPA amounts to losing direction in the Manipuri's fight to live in peace from terrorism.

The author is former director general military operations, and currently director, Delhi Policy Group

Ducking a probe

Centre can't do a Pilate

The many complications in the Manipur tragedy say something about the difficulties in zeroing in on a single aspect for specific examination. Yet there can be few yarns as tall or inane as the one that 17 Assam Rifles is trying to spin — that its personnel cannot appear before the Upendra Commission because they are fearful of venturing beyond their Kangla Fort. If a key security agency cannot protect a few of its men at a location near its barracks it ought to acknowledge incompetence and disband itself. Even if the ill-will it arouses from common folk is unjustified and is engineered by mischievous elements, a fighting force cannot be under mental and physical siege. Citing security concerns and requesting that its men be examined within their premises only fuels suspicion that it has no valid explanation for the custodial death of Th Manorama.

There are precedents of armed forces not responding to summons from judicial commissions. The line that New Delhi has sometimes taken is that since the army (and its allied agencies) are responsible to the Central Government they are not answerable to inquiry commissions of the states. The position is not a mere technicality. It is based on the theory that leaders of state governments (particularly in the North-east) have such close links with insurgent outfits that it is unwise to deploy local police units. Summon Central forces and order inquiries into actions of the latter to garner political advantage. Not everybody would agree with that position, but it is not entirely devoid of logic. That logic, however, does not apply in the probe into Th Manorama's death. Union ministers have referred to a judicial probe to deal with the situation. This endorses Upendra Commission. Having done so, the Centre cannot do a Pilate and wash its hands of the virtual boycott of the Commission by the para-military unit. The Assam Rifles functions under Home and Defence ministries, so New Delhi must order the unit to appear before the Commission — or display the guts to contend that no state-ordered probe can be launched into action of a Central force. The questions being asked in Manipur have to be answered, one way or the other. The buck stops somewhere beyond the Kangla Fort.

THE STATESMAN

19 AUG 2004

Bandh hits life in Manipur; 17 held

9/18/68
IMPHAL, Aug. 18. A truck was set ablaze and 17 persons were arrested here in the continuing demonstrations for the withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act from Manipur as an indefinite bandh affected normal life for the second day today.

Official sources said a truck was set afire at the Khabam Lamkhai area, about 20 km north of here, by purported supporters of the bandh called by 32 organisations (locally known as 'Apurba Lup.')

The bandh had been called over self-immolation and death of student leader Pebam Chitranjan at Bishenpur on Sunday to press for the removal of the Act.

Leaders of the outfits said the bandh would end only after the cremation of the body lying in hospital for the past three days. The cremation could not be held yesterday because the State authorities did not permit a protest demonstration carrying the body.

With the indefinite bandh entering the second day, markets and shops remained closed and transport services suspended. Official sources said attendance in government offices was nil.

17 arrested

Seventeen persons, nine of them women, were rounded up from different places at Kekrupat here early this morning. The total number of persons



TAKING NO CHANCES: Police searching people lined up on a street in Imphal on Tuesday during an indefinite strike called by various organisations. — PTI

arrested has crossed 60, sources freed on grounds of ill health. disperse hundreds of agitators West district. The agitators had said adding that eight promi- Meanwhile, police fired in the who pelted stones at the Sing- also blocked the Imphal-Singja- ment women leaders had been air and burst teargas shells to jamei police station in Imphal mei road. — PTI

19 AUG 1968

ACT OF FORCE

It must be an abnormal situation when a democratic state is perceived as an instrument of force. The continuing violence in Manipur may easily blur the distinction between perception and reality. There is little doubt that the anger against the abuses of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act has spread far and deep among the people. The death of a woman in the army's custody, which has triggered the current spell of violence, raises serious questions about the use of state power. Even if the woman had links with some militant group, as has been alleged, the army needs to answer for the custodial death. Unfortunately, the judicial inquiry into the incident has so far received little support from the local commanders of the army. Such lapses on the part of the state are largely responsible for creating the perception of the army as a force of repression. The fact, however, is that the act has been in force in Manipur, as in some other states in the North-east, to uphold the rule of law in the face of the militants' threat to subvert it. The majority of people should actually benefit from the act — if only its provisions were used judiciously.

It is not difficult to see why most political parties now want the act to be withdrawn. The swelling of popular sentiments against it has forced their hands. The decision of the chief minister, Mr Okram Ibobi Singh, to withdraw the act from the Imphal municipal area was obviously guided more by this popular feeling than by administrative necessity. Mr Singh cannot have been unaware of the Centre's disapproval of his move. But politics is local everywhere. The Centre cannot afford, however, to be guided by political considerations alone in tackling the situation. There is a very real possibility that Manipur's many insurgent groups will exploit the public mood to try and sabotage both democracy and the rule of law in the state. New Delhi's strategy to control the situation should have two clear aims. One is to isolate and defeat the militants in their devious games. And the other is to regain the people's confidence in the state's power and sincerity to ensure them a life free from the fear of the militants. Obviously, the political establishment, both in Imphal and New Delhi, has its role in correcting the popular perception of the army. Even a spell of president's rule may be better than allowing Manipur to plunge completely into chaos.

Centre ready for unconditional talks on Manipur

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 17. While asserting that the Centre was not afraid of the situation in Manipur, the Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, today said the Government was ready to hold unconditional talks with anybody who was willing to talk in order to re-establish normality and peace in Manipur.

"The Chief Minister is trying his best to defuse the situation. If we find that he is not acting in the interest of the country, we will not fail to act. We are a giving a chance to the elected representatives of the people. The State Government may belong to this party or that, we are not going to excuse our own Government. We will do it because it is our duty and because we are angry," Mr. Patil said while replying to clarifications sought by the members in the Rajya Sabha on his statement on the Manipur situation.

Replying to clarification sought by Reishang Keishing, also a former Chief Minister of Manipur, Mr. Patil said the veteran leader could be instrumental in initiating the dialogue process. "If we can agree to hold talks in Jammu and Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, and Nagaland, we can certainly talk to the people of Manipur. This is an invitation to those who want to come and talk to us," he said.

"On razor's edge"

On the clarification sought by Sushma Swaraj, Deputy Leader of the BJP in the Rajya Sabha, on how long the Government would wait before taking firm steps, Mr. Patil said the Government would wait only as long as was necessary. "We are walking on the razor's edge. We will not act hurriedly so that things do not fall in place but we will also not wait unnecessarily. Our authority is not so small so as to simply vanish and there is no difference between me or the Defence Minister. People who have picked up arms are also our brothers and we have a re-



UNITED WE STAND: Protesters form a human chain during a civil disobedience movement in Imphal on Tuesday, demanding the removal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act from Manipur. — Photo: Robert Sapam

sponsibility towards them as well," he said.

Without going into specific allegations relating to the killing of Manorama Devi by the Assam Rifles personnel as there were two sets of inquiries on the issue, Mr. Patil said the Assam Rifles men were ready to depose before the judicial commission set up by the State Government if the hearings were held in camera or the commission held its sittings in their camp or even

drawn from Imphal. The Union Government is watching the situation. It will take appropriate action to meet the situation."

Earlier, the BJP demanded in the Rajya Sabha that the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, initiate a dialogue with political and civil groups in Manipur and that the Government should re-view if not repeal the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in Manipur. While seeking clarifications, Ms. Swaraj said the

Prime Minister should call political and civil groups for a dialogue to defuse the situation in the sensitive border State.

'Layered blackmail'

The Leader of the Opposition, Jaswant Singh, charged the Congress-led Ibobi Singh Government with indulging in "layered blackmail" and "complicity" in the ongoing unrest in Manipur. Describing the situation in Manipur as a chal-

lenge to the country's unity and integrity, Mr. Singh said the Chief Minister was being pressurised to act in a certain manner and he, in turn, was pressurising the Centre. "We cannot let this layered blackmail to go on," he said.

Jairam Ramesh (Congress) Government had taken to safeguard families of the State police and armed forces personnel who were fighting insurgents.

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COWARDLY ATTACK

18-10 18/8 ✓

THE EXPLOSION THAT killed 16 children in Assam on Independence Day must rank as one of the most barbaric among the countless atrocities committed by the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). If the extremist group wanted to make its presence felt and convey the message that it can strike at will in the State, it has certainly managed to do that. But through the heinous attack at a school in the remote district of Dhemaji, the terrorist organisation that claims to be waging war against the Indian state on behalf of the Assamese has exposed itself as utterly anti-people. Among the people of Assam, ULFA's stock is already low. Since the mid-1990s, they have made it clear in several ways that they do not support the group's terrorist methods and its extortionist ways. Sunday's attack may have helped ULFA score some dubious points against the Centre and the Assam Government. It is true that such an attack could not have been planned and carried out without some help and support on the ground. But judging by the outrage the killings have provoked in Dhemaji and elsewhere in the State, and the outpouring of sympathy for the bereaved parents, it is clear that once again the organisation has earned no points with the majority of the people in Assam.

At the same time, it is not at all surprising that some of the people's anger is directed against the Government for failing to ensure the security of their children. The attack on the school ground was not the only one in Assam on Sunday. There was an explosion at another school in the same district and one more in Dhubri district, in lower Assam. It was only sheer luck that these attacks caused no casualties. The in-

cidents have shown up an appalling failure of intelligence and an inexplicable lowering of guard in a State that has been experiencing terrorism for over two decades. The complacency is all the more disturbing because these were not entirely unexpected incidents. Over the last two months, a spate of explosions and at least one case of abduction have been reported from across Assam. Since November 2003, when militant groups in the Northeast announced a ban on the screening of Hindi films, ULFA has notched up five attacks on cinema halls. The latest of these took place last Saturday. It is evident that the organisation has relentlessly kept up the pressure on the State. In such a situation, the bland admission following the school killings by the Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, of a lapse in security is shocking. The State Government has more explaining to do than that.

The attacks have also shown that while ULFA may have suffered some setbacks in the December 2003 military operation by Bhutan against the group's hideouts on its soil, its other networks continue to operate effectively. India must continue to press Bangladesh to ensure it does not allow safe havens within its boundaries for ULFA or other extremist groups operating in the Northeast. As for talks with ULFA, one of its leaders recently said the group was prepared to drop two of its preconditions for negotiations with the Centre — namely that talks should be held outside India, and through a foreign mediator — provided New Delhi was willing to discuss the issue of sovereignty. It cannot seriously expect the Indian Government even to consider such a demand. If it is sincere about holding talks, it must avoid grandstanding.

THE HINDU

18 AUG 2004

Student agitator succumbs to burns

Imphal: A student leader who attempted self-immolation, succumbed to his injuries on Monday, raising tension in Manipur where the government cracked down on the agitation for the withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act arresting eight prominent women leaders, official sources said.

The sources said 28-year old Pebam Chitaranjan, who received 90% burns while attempting to set himself ablaze on Sunday, died at 2.00 p.m. this afternoon at the Regional Institute of Medical Science Hospital here.

Reports said security and police posts were put on maximum alert as the news of the death of Chitaranjan, advisor to the Manipur Students Federation, spread like wild fire creating tension in the valley.

MANIPUR PROTEST

Chitaranjan's death comes after 23-year-old Nimita, injured by tear gas shells fired by police on August 7, succumbed to her injuries on Sunday.

Meanwhile, eight prominent women leaders in the vanguard of the agitation were arrested as arterial roads were blocked and the first phase of the boycott of 'India-made' goods was launched by the 32 organisations spearheading the stir, the sources said.

Those arrested included general secretary of the All Manipur Women Social Reformation and Development Samaj (AMWSRDS) Ima Ramani, publicity secretary of the All Manipur Kanba Ima Lup (Mothers Group to Protect Manipur) Ima Ibetombi, former president of Thangmeiband Nupi Lup (a women's group) Ima Gyaneswari and AMWSRDS member Tombi. The women refused to be released on personal bond and would be sent to judicial custody, the sources said. Agencies

Crack the whip

5/8
17/8
Ulfa should get short shrift 8/15/04

Ulfa's savage bomb attack at an Independence Day celebration at Dhemaji which killed 13, including 10 school children, underscores the fact that they are no longer insurgents but terrorists and deserve the strongest condemnation. Last December's Bhutan crackdown on Ulfa and Bodo hideouts seems to have knocked the wind out of these outfits, but only temporarily. For the first time last month they killed seven bus passengers, but the bombs were said to have gone off accidentally. The incident was preceded by bomb blasts in a Tinsukia cinema and at a market place.

Early this month, Ulfa destroyed some oil and power structures and launched a grenade attack on a BSF camp in Guwahati, killing one. For the past eight months, such incidents have become routine. Chief minister Tarun Gogoi must determine how so serious an incident like Dhemaji escaped Intelligence attention. There can be no excuses.

The police should have anticipated trouble because Ulfa threatened violence if its call for boycott of Independence Day celebrations was defied. Could Ulfa have chosen Dhemaji — basically the stronghold of the National Liberation Front of Bodoland — to deflect suspicion? Gogoi is right to argue that given the deteriorating situation he could not agree to withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, but it would be erroneous to blame Manipuris who are merely protesting against the large number of cases of alleged human rights violations by security force personnel.

Ulfa's reported offer of talks if Delhi agreed to discuss "sovereignty" on home turf amounts to advertising that it is willing but the Centre is not. Unless chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa has said as much, the offer means little. Changing tack is something one cannot associate with Ulfa leaders unequivocally committed to "swadhin Asom" but they need to ponder the cost of a seemingly losing battle. The impressive voter turnouts in every assembly and parliamentary election in defiance of Ulfa boycott calls is virtual rejection of the outfit's cherished dream and every active cadre may as well carry an indelible ISI mark that translates into "no future". Their leaders have become victims of their own making and can least afford to leave the flourishing businesses and accoutrements, they have grown accustomed to in Bangladesh.

The recent ceasefire with the A'chik National Volunteers Council, with links to Ulfa, may help stop infiltration into Garo Hills that provide a safe corridor to Bangladesh. But unless Dhaka cooperates by denying insurgents shelter and blocks supplies of weapons from across the border, Delhi can do little. Bangladesh has all along denied the existence of rebel camps on its territory despite the BSF providing a list. Delhi must make Dhaka wise to this reality, the sooner the better.

The entire North-east is restive and a closer look by the Central government and its agencies is needed. Time is running out.

17 AUG 2004

THE STATESMAN

Northeast shocks

Manipur, now Assam: Congress governments in the region had better get their act together

THE tragic deaths of 20 people — including children and women — as a result of a bomb blast at a small town over 500-km east of Guwahati in Assam on Independence Day come as a major blot on the efficiency and effectiveness of both the Congress-led government in the state and its police force. Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi has already admitted to shabby policing and has suspended the SP and DSP of the district. The fact that there were two other terrorist bomb blasts in different locations of the state — fortunately without casualties — only goes to prove the lax security arrangements in a state that has been witness to militant activity for decades.

It should have been obvious, even to a child, that militants — the ULFA is believed to be behind the latest outrage — would try and attempt a terrorist strike on a significant national day like August 15. Security arrangements should have been more stringent than normal given this possibility. It is for this reason that the venues for such events are carefully chosen and sanitised. What is clear is the failure of leadership in the police force.

What is, perhaps, less clear is the failure of political leadership, both at the Centre and the state.

The question is inevitable: if Bhutan can decimate the ULFA and other terrorists in its jungles, why cannot our political leadership and state police do so? At the level of the police, it seems that the reforms in the management of national security, introduced more than three years ago, has had little effect. A primary central police organisation like the CRPF has been failing in recent weeks even to protect itself. And the Group of Ministers' decision to de-induct the army and the BSF from counter-terrorism and internal security duties has had to be reversed because of the failures of the CRPF. What is, therefore, also needed is an urgent audit of the implementation of the reforms authorised in 2001 to decide the future course of action beyond the specific incidents. As for the political management of the security of the region, the Union home ministry had better shake off its characteristic apathy and ensure that the Congress governments in the region, at the very least, get their act together.

INDIAN EXPRESS

17 AUG 2004

Manipur stir intensifies as student leader dies

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IMPHAL, AUG. 16. Manipur was plunged into fresh turmoil today when a student leader who set fire to himself on Sunday died of burns, even as the State Government cracked down on the agitation for the withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act by arresting eight women leaders.

Security and police posts were put on maximum alert as news of the death of Pebam Chitaranjan (28), adviser to the Manipur Students Federation, spread sparking tension.

Chitaranjan, who died of 90 per cent burns, alleged in a letter purportedly written by him that the people of Manipur were living under "colonial rule".

In the letter, written on Friday and released to the local press by some of his friends today, he claimed that neither the State Government nor the Centre was bothered to protect human rights in the State.

He had said that he was taking his life to show to the world that "human rights violations" were being committed in the name of protecting democracy in the State and prayed to his parents, family and friends to pardon him.

The eight women leaders who were arrested refused to be released on personal bond even

as the first phase of the boycott of 'India-made' goods — soft drinks and mineral water — was launched by the 32 organisations spearheading the stir. Protesting against the death of Chitaranjan, the organisations called a lightning 'Manipur bandh', which would continue till the cremation of his body, after a post-mortem expected to be done tomorrow.

Month-long stir

A month-long action programme would begin tomorrow during which protest rallies, submission of memoranda and other forms of democratic agitations would be launched, the organisations said.

The civil disobedience movement calling for the closure of Government offices was on since August 9.

'A trial withdrawal'

The Chief Minister, O. Ibobi Singh, said on Sunday that the Government had withdrawn the said Act from seven Assembly segments in the Imphal municipal area on a trial basis. The Government, he had said, would consider lifting of the Act from the State if extortions stopped and development work was not hindered. — PTI

Photograph on Page 11

Centre to 'wait and watch'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 16. The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs met here today and decided to continue with the Centre's "wait and watch" policy on Manipur. The CCPA meeting is the second since the State Government decided to lift partially the Armed Forces Special Powers Act from Imphal city limits. Government sources told *The Hindu* that the CCPA went into the developments that had been on the boil since last month.

The Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, is likely to make a statement in the Rajya Sabha tomorrow on the situation in Manipur. The UPA Government's standpoint and the steps

it has taken to tackle the situation are expected to be spelt out. The members of the House can seek clarifications.

Swift response favoured

The two-hour CCPA meeting, chaired by the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, considered options to defuse the situation. The sources said the CCPA considered inputs provided by several agencies which favoured a swift response.

The possibility of a change in the political leadership in the State is not ruled out. The Chief Minister, Ibobi Singh, heads a coalition Government, led by the Congress in the 60-member Assembly. He is under pressure with a section of his Ministers threatening to resign.

বিশ্বেভকারীরা 'জঙ্গি-মদতে পুষ্ট', মন্তব্যে ক্ষোভ মণিপুরে

প্রভাত ঘোষ • ইফল

১৬ অগস্ট: তেত্রিশ বছরের কেঁচুচরঙ্গন সিংহ মারা গেলেন আজ। রবিবার সারা দেশ যখন ৫৭তম স্বাধীনতা দিবস উদযাপন করছে, তখন বেলা সাড়ে দশটা নাগাদ বিষ্ণুপুর জেলা সদর বাজারে গাড়ে কেরোসিন তেল ঢেলে আঙন লাগিয়ে দেন ওই যুবক।

এখানে রিজিওনাল ইনস্টিটিউট অফ শেডিক্যাল সায়েন্সেস হাসপাতালে দুপুরে তাঁকে আনা হয়। হাসপাতালের চিকিৎসক জানান, যুবকের শরীর ৮-২ শতাংশেরও বেশি পুড়ে গিয়েছে। ওই দিন রাজ্যে 'কাল দিবস' পালন করে ৩২টি বিশ্বেভকারী সংগঠন। আজ বিকাল সাড়ে তিনটে নাগাদ চিত্তরঞ্জন মারা যান। সব মিলিয়ে মণিপুর এখনও অশান্ত। ছাত্র নেতা চিত্তরঞ্জনের মৃত্যুর পরই মণিপুরে ফের কশের ডাক দেওয়া হয়েছে, শেষকৃত্য না-হওয়া পর্যন্ত বন্ধ চলবে।

এ দিকে নয়াদিল্লি থেকে স্টাফ রিপোর্টারের খবর: মণিপুরের পরিস্থিতি নিয়ে আজ প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভার রাজনৈতিক বিষয়ক কমিটির বৈঠকে বিস্তারিত পর্যালোচনা

করেন। গত কালই মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ইবোবি সিংহ ইস্তিক দিয়েছিলেন, রাজ্যের পরিস্থিতি দ্রুত স্বাভাবিক না হলে তিনি আবারও সশস্ত্র বাহিনীর বিশেষ ক্ষমতা আইন জারি করতে বাধ্য হবেন। কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার এখনও মণিপুর সরকারকে ওই পক্ষে যেতেই বোঝানোর চেষ্টা চালাচ্ছে।

এ ব্যাপারে নতুন রাজ্যপালকে ইফলে থেকে নিয়মিত রাজ্য সরকারের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করতে বলা হয়েছে। তবে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারি সূত্রের ইঙ্গিত, সবরকম চেষ্টা ব্যর্থ হলে একমাত্র তখনই মণিপুরে রাষ্ট্রপতি শাসনের কথা ভাবা হবে।

গত ১১ জুলাই কাকভোরে থাংজাম মনোরমা নামে এক যুবতীর গুলিবিদ্ধ দেহ উদ্ধারের পর থেকেই 'গোটা' রাজ্যে যে গণবিক্ষোভ চলছে, চিত্তরঞ্জন তাঁর দ্বিতীয় বনি। প্রথম জন হলেন, বছর ২৫-এর এক মহিলা, নাম মেমিতা। ৭ তারিখ এক প্রতিবাদ মিছিলে তিনি ছিলেন। কাঁদানে গ্যাসের শেল ও রবারের বুলেটে তিনি আহত হন, পরে মারা যান। গায়ে আঙন লাগানোর আগে লিখে যাওয়া একটি চিঠিতে চিত্তরঞ্জন বলেছেন, মণিপুরে 'ওপলিবেশিক শাসন' চলছে। জঙ্গি ধরার নামে

মৃত্যুর এই সংখ্যায় উৎকণ্ঠিত নন মণিপুর রাজ্য পুলিশের ডিউজ এ কে পরাশর। মৃত্যুর সংখ্যা পুলিশে তিনি প্রমাণ করতে চান, মণিপুরে সাম্প্রতিক অশান্তিকে ঝামেকাই 'গণ বিক্ষোভ' বলে চিৎকার করা হচ্ছে। তাঁর মতে, আসলে বিক্ষোভ দেখাচ্ছেন উগ্রপন্থীদের মদতপ্রাপ্ত কিছু মানুষ। যদিও রিমস ও জওহরলাল নেহরু হাসপাতালের হিসাবে, মাসখানেকের বেশি সময় ধরে চলা এই বিক্ষোভে শুধু রাজধানীতেই ৭৮৪ জনকে আহত অবস্থায় ভর্তি করতে হয়েছে। এর মধ্যে ৬৪১ জন মহিলা। এই দুটি হাসপাতাল ছাড়া গোটা রাজ্যের হাসপাতালগুলিকে ধরলে আহতের সংখ্যা সাড়ে চার হাজার ছাড়িয়ে যাবে। ডিজির বক্তব্য মানতে গেলে, এই সাড়ে চার হাজারের সঙ্গে ধরতে হবে কয়েক লাখ সক্রিয় বিক্ষোভকারীকে। যাদের মধ্যে পড়বেন মণিপুর বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের উপাচার্য এন বিজয়, সাহিত্য অকাদেমি ও পদ্মশ্রী পুরস্কারপ্রাপ্ত লেখিকা রাজকুমারী বিনোদিনী দেবীও।

রাজ্যের পুলিশকর্তা অবশ্য রাজ্যের মদতপ্রাপ্ত মুখ্যমন্ত্রী কড়া ভাষায় জানিয়েছেন, বিক্ষোভ চলতে থাকলে ইফল পর এলাকা থেকে প্রত্যাহার করে নেওয়া উপক্রম এলাকা আইন পুনরায় জারি করা হবে। তিনি বলেন, "বিক্ষোভ বন্ধ রেখে বরং আন্দোলনকারীরা তাদের সমতাপ্তা জঙ্গিদের সরকারের সঙ্গে নিঃশর্ত

মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ইবোবি সিংহের ভাবনার প্রতিধ্বনি করে আসছেন। রবিবার, স্বাধীনতা দিবসের বক্তৃতায় এবং পরে সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে তিনি বলেন, "বিক্ষোভকারীদের ৩২টি সংগঠনের পিছনে জঙ্গিরা আছে। এই সব সংগঠনগুলি মণিপুরের মানুষের প্রতিনিধিত্ব করছে বলে সংবাদমাধ্যমে যা বলা হচ্ছে, তা সম্পূর্ণ মিথ্যা।" তিনি বলেন, "আমি, আমার মন্ত্রিসভা, শাসক ফরটের যত বিধায়ক, তাঁরা তো এ রাজ্যেরই মানুষ। তাঁরা তো বিক্ষোভকারীদের সঙ্গে নেই।" অকণা, মন্ত্রিসভা সন্মেলন আইনে বাদ পড়া দুই প্রাক্তন মন্ত্রী, এন ধীরেন ও কে রঞ্জিত, ৬ জন বিধায়ক, ও দুই বর্তমান মন্ত্রী, গোবিন্দ দাস ও কে আলাউদ্দিন হুমকি দিয়েছিলেন, বিক্ষোভকারীদের দাবি মানা না হলে তাঁরা ইস্তফা দিবেন। অর্থাৎ তাঁরাও জঙ্গিদের মদতপ্রাপ্ত।

মুখ্যমন্ত্রী কড়া ভাষায় জানিয়েছেন, বিক্ষোভ চলতে থাকলে ইফল পর এলাকা থেকে প্রত্যাহার করে নেওয়া উপক্রম এলাকা আইন পুনরায় জারি করা হবে। তিনি বলেন, "বিক্ষোভ বন্ধ রেখে বরং আন্দোলনকারীরা তাদের সমতাপ্তা জঙ্গিদের সরকারের সঙ্গে নিঃশর্ত

আলোচনায় বসার পরামর্শ দিক।" তিনি জোর দিয়ে বলেন, বিক্ষোভ ও জঙ্গি তাণ্ডব বন্ধ হলে তিনি রাজ্য থেকে উপক্রম এলাকা আইন প্রত্যাহার করবেন। তিনি যোগ্য করেন, "অসম রাইফেলসের গুলিতে ১১ জুলাই মনোরমা নামে যে যুবতী মারা যান, তিনি কুখ্যাত জঙ্গি সংগঠন পিপলস লিবারেশন আর্মি-এর সক্রিয় সদস্য ছিলেন। শি ওয়াজ আ পঙ্কা টেরিবিষ্টি।"

গত কাল সকালে মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর বক্তব্যের পরেই গোটা রাজধানী শহর, চুড়চাঁদপুর, যৌবল, জিরিবাম, বিষ্ণুপুরে দলে দলে মানুষ বিক্ষোভ দেখাতে থাকেন। বিভিন্ন জায়গায় মানববন্ধন তৈরি হয়।

মানববন্ধনের বেশিরভাগ জুড়েই ছিলেন মহিলারা। এদের রুখতে নীল পোশাক পরা রায়ফ, কালো পোশাকের ইন্ডিয়ান রিজার্ভ ব্যাটালিয়ন, রাজ্য পুলিশের সশস্ত্র বাহিনী, সি আর পি এফ ব্যাপিয়ে পড়ে। বিষ্ণুপুরে অনির্দিষ্টকালের কাফু জারি করা হয়েছে। চালানো হয়েছে রবার বুলেট, কাঁদানে গ্যাস, আসল পেরেক-কু ভরা বোমা। আহতের সংখ্যা বেশ কয়েক শো।

শান্তি প্রক্রিয়ায় ধাক্কা বিস্ফোরণে আলফা, হত ১৬ অসমে

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, গুয়াহাটী ও
নয়াদিল্লি, ১৬ অগস্ট: আলফার সঙ্গে
কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের শান্তি-আলোচনা ও
চুক্তি-স্বাক্ষরের পরিকল্পনা জোর ধাক্কা
খেল। স্বাধীনতা দিবসের সকালে ওই
জঙ্গি সংগঠনের ঘটানো বিস্ফোরণে
অসমের ধেমাজিতে ১৬ জন নিহত ও
প্রায় ৪০ জন আহত হয়েছেন।
হতাহতদের অধিকাংশই স্কুলের
ছেলেমেয়ে। এই ঘটনার নিন্দা করে ও
মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর পদত্যাগের দাবিতে সারা
অসম ছাত্র ইউনিয়ন ('আসু') বুধবার
অসম বনধ-এর ডাক দিয়েছে। তবে
কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রক সূত্রে জানানো
হয়েছে, এই ঘটনা সন্ত্রাস ও শান্তি-
প্রক্রিয়ার পরিকল্পনা অব্যাহত থাকবে।

স্বাধীনতা দিবসে পতাকা উত্তোলন
অনুষ্ঠানে এই বিস্ফোরণ হয়। স্বাধীনতা
দিবস উদ্‌যাপন অনুষ্ঠানে এত বড়
নাশকতার ঘটনা সারা দেশে এই প্রথম।
ঘটনার জেরে আজ সারা রাজ্যে
সরকারিভাবে 'শোক দিবস' পালন করা
হয়। সাসপেন্ড করা হয়েছে জেলার
পুলিশ সুপার ও অতিরিক্ত পুলিশ
সুপারকে। বদলি করে দেওয়া হয়
জেলাশাসককেও। ঘটনার প্রতিবাদে
আজ 'আসু'-র ডাকে ধেমাজি বনধ
পালিত হয়। নিহতদের পরিবারকে
মাথাপিছু ৩ লক্ষ টাকা ও গুরুতর
আহতদের ৫০ হাজার টাকা করে
দেওয়ার কথা সরকারি ভাবে ঘোষণা
করা হয়েছে।

গত কাল অসমে আরও দুই
জায়গায় স্বাধীনতা দিবস অনুষ্ঠানে
আলফা জঙ্গিরা আঘাত হানে। তবে,
সেই দুই জায়গায় কেউ হতাহত হয়নি।

আজ সন্ধ্যার পরে আলফা নেতা
অরবিন্দ রাজখোয়ার সই করা যে চিঠি
গুয়াহাটীতে সংবাদ-মাধ্যমের কাছে
পৌঁছয়, তাতে ধেমাজির ঘটনার জন্য
দুঃখ প্রকাশ করেও স্বীকার করা হয়েছে
যে বিস্ফোরণের ঘটনা আলফাই
ঘটিয়েছে। প্রতি বছর ১৫ অগস্ট
আলফা স্বাধীনতা দিবস বয়কটের ডাক
দেয়। বিক্ষিপ্ত কিছু ঘটনা ঘটলেও এই
দিনে এত বড় নাশকতা আগে ঘটেনি।
গোয়েন্দাদের অনুমান, রাজখোয়া-
গোষ্ঠীর সঙ্গে কেন্দ্র আপসের ইচ্ছা
প্রকাশ করায় শান্তি-প্রক্রিয়ার যে
সম্ভাবনা দেখা দিয়েছে, তাতে জল
ঢালার জন্য পরেশ বড়ুয়া-গোষ্ঠী এই
আক্রমণই শুধু হানল না,
রাজখোয়াকেও এই মর্মে বিবৃতি

প্রকাশেও বাধ্য করল। আজ দিশপুরের
সচিবালয়ে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী তরুণ গগৈও এক
শোকসভায় বলেন, "এই ঘটনা আবার
প্রমাণ করল যে আলফা শান্তির পথে
আসতে আগ্রহী নয়।" তবে এই সব
সন্ত্রাসে কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রকের এক
মুখপাত্র বলেন, "এক দিকে শান্তি-
আলোচনা ও অন্যদিকে জঙ্গি-দমন
একই সঙ্গে চলবে।"

গত কাল ধেমাজি কলেজে
স্বাধীনতা দিবস উদ্‌যাপন অনুষ্ঠানে
অংশ নিতে জেলাশাসক মুকেশ সাহু
সবে গাড়ি থেকে নেমেছেন তখন
সকাল নটা বাজতে পাঁচ। প্রচণ্ড শব্দে
ফেটে উঠল মাটির নীচে লুকোনো দূর
নিয়ন্ত্রিত বোমা (আই ই ডি)। মঞ্চের
ডান দিকে দেড়শ মিটার দূরত্বে তৈরি
হয় আট ফুট গর্ত। আর্ট চিৎকারে
চারদিক ভরে ওঠে। আতঙ্কে শুরু হয়ে
যায় ছোট্ট ছোট্ট দৌড়োতে গিয়ে
অনেকে পড়ে যায়। নিরাপত্তাকর্মীরাও
বিভ্রান্তের মত ছোট্ট ছোট্ট করতে থাকে।
ছড়িয়ে ছিটিয়ে পড়ে থাকা নিহত ও
আহতদের নিয়ে যাওয়া হয় ধেমাজি
অসামরিক হাসপাতালে।

খবর শুনেই গুয়াহাটী থেকে
অসমের স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী রকিবুল হোসেন
ঘটনাস্থলে যান। উত্তেজিত জনতার
রোষের মুখে পড়েন তিনি। গাড়ি লক্ষ
করে উত্তেজিত জনতা ইট ছুড়তে
থাকে। জনতাকে ছত্রভঙ্গ করতে পুলিশ
প্রথমে লাঠি চালায়। বিস্ফোভ না থামায়
শেষ পর্যন্ত শূন্যে কয়েকশো রাউন্ড
গুলি ও কাঁদানে গ্যাস ছুড়ে পুলিশ
পরিষ্কৃতি নিয়ন্ত্রণে আনে।

ঘটনার তীব্র নিন্দা করে প্রধানমন্ত্রী
মনমোহন সিংহ এক বিবৃতিতে
বলেছেন, "এই ধরনের হিংসার সঙ্গে
যারা যুক্ত, কোনও ভাবে তারা পার
পাবে না। সন্ত্রাসবাদের অভিশাপ নির্মূল
করার জন্য সব রকমের শক্তি প্রয়োগ
করা হবে।" ঘটনার জন্য দুঃখ ও নিন্দা
প্রকাশ করে রাষ্ট্রপতি এ পি জে আব্দুল
কালাম মুখ্যমন্ত্রীকে একটি চিঠি পাঠিয়ে
আহতদের সহায়তায় সব রকম ব্যবস্থা
নিতে রাজ্য সরকারকে নির্দেশ
দিয়েছেন। নিহতদের পরিবারকে
মাথাপিছু ৩ লক্ষ টাকা এবং গুরুতর
আহতদের ৫০ হাজার টাকা করে
দেওয়ার কথা সরকারি ভাবে ঘোষণা
করা হয়েছে।

- ধুবুড়িতেও টাইম বোমা.... পৃঃ ৭
- মৃগার মুখে আলফা.... পৃঃ ৭

6 schoolchildren among 13 killed in Assam I-Day blast

Police Burst Tear Gas To Quell Angry Mob

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Guwahati: Six schoolchildren and seven women died and 21 others were injured in a blast carried out by the United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) during the Independence Day celebrations at a college ground in Dhemaji district of Assam, on the north bank of Brahmaputra bordering Arunachal Pradesh. Four of the injured were reported to be in a critical condition and they were airlifted to Assam Medical College at Dibrugarh in an army helicopter.

The state government has announced a state mourning on Monday in honour of the dead. The improvised explosive device (IED) blew off at about 9.45 am, soon after the tricolour was unfurled at Dhemaji college where the district administration was holding the official Independence Day function. Another blast occurred at nearby Dhakuakhana, but no casualty was reported.

In a violent reaction to the blast, a mob went on the rampage and damaged several vehicles near the venue. Deputy commissioner of police M Sahoo was hurt, while the vehicle of the local MLA, AGP's Dilip Saikia, in which minister of state for home

Rockybul Hussain was travelling, was damaged by a stone-pelting mob.

The police had to resort to firing in the air and bursting tear-gas shells to disperse the agitated mob, who blocked the road making it difficult for the district administration to rush the

injured to the hospital.

Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi told TOI, "There was certainly a security lapse as the militants could breach the secured area and plant the explosives." District superintendent of police T Thengniew

and additional superintendent of police A Sufian were suspended. Additional chief secretary P C Sharma has been ordered to conduct an inquiry into the lapse of security arrangements.

Gogoi said that there was definite intelligence feedback about possible attacks by militants in the run-up to I-Day and "we had alerted all districts. But today's incident was purely due to a complacent police force, which seemed to have taken the warnings lightly."

The Ulfa and six other militant outfits of the northeast have called for a boycott of the Independence Day celebrations and a general strike. However, in Assam, the general strike had been limited to Guwahati because of the floods.

Gogoi immediately ordered the police and other security forces to come down heavily on the militants. "This act of cowardice by the militants shows that they are not interested in peace talks. It is time now for us to deal

with them more firmly," he said.

A couple of days ago, the home department had said that according to intelligence feedback only three districts—Dibrugarh, Jorhat and Dhubri—were vulnerable to ultras' attacks on Independence Day.



PM lists seven priority areas

New Delhi: In an address that laid emphasis on good governance, probity in public life and economic development of underprivileged and minorities, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Sunday unveiled seven priority sectors for focused attention, called for a code of conduct for all political parties and affirmed government's firm resolve to carry forward the composite dialogue process with Pakistan.

Singh outlined the roadmap for a prosperous Bharat that talked about empowerment of people and making government more transparent and officials accountable. The Prime Minister vowed to fight the menace of terrorism. Agencies P 7

16 killed, 40 injured in Assam blast

● ULFA hand suspected

By Sushanta Talukdar

GUWAHATI, AUG. 15. Sixteen schoolchildren, including nine girls, were killed and 40 injured in Assam's Dhemaji district today, when suspected militants of the banned United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) triggered a powerful blast.

Police said that the blast triggered by a remote-controlled device took place around 9 a.m. when the children gathered at Dhemaji College ground for the Independence Day parade. All the injured have been admitted to the Dhemaji Civil Hospital and 10 of the critically injured will be shifted to Dibrugarh Civil Hospital.

Another blast at Dhakuakhana in the same district uprooted the main pillar for the flag in the central field near Normal School. There was no casualty in the blast which occurred at 7.55 a.m.

There were also reports of a bomb explosion in Dhubri district this afternoon. The bomb planted in the Gauripur ground where Independence Day was being observed this morning went off at 1. 20 p.m. just behind the VIP enclosure. There were no reports of casualty.

The ULFA had called for a boycott of the celebrations, along with five other rebel groups of the northeast region. The outfits had called a general strike beginning on the midnight of August 14 till 5.30 p.m. today. However, the ULFA attack came despite the militant outfit announcing that the general strike would be enforced only in Guwahati in view of the prevailing flood situation.

Most barbaric: Gogoi

The Assam Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, condemned the blast and announced that the State would observe August 16 as mourning day in memory of the killed children.

He said the incident was "most barbaric, inhuman and pathetic." "This incident once again laid bare the utter denigration of all human values of the terrorists." He said this is yet another instance of "cowardice on the part of the frustrated ter-

rorists. Such a heinous act of violence must be condemned by one and all."

Suspended

Official sources said that the Superintendent of Police and Additional SP of Dhemaji district have been suspended for negligence of duty. The State Government decided to transfer the Deputy Commissioner of the district for security lapse as the intelligence agencies had warned about an attack.

On Mr. Gogoi's orders, the Minister of State for Home, Rockybul Hussain, the DGP, P.V. Sumant, Commissioner North Assam Division, C.K. Sarma, and IGP (Law and Order) D.K. Pathak, rushed to Dhemaji this morning.

Ex-gratia

Mr. Gogoi announced an ex-gratia of Rs. 3 lakhs for the victims and Rs. 50,000 for the seriously injured in the blast. The Dhemaji and Lakhimpur unit of the All-Assam Students Union has called a 12-hour bandh in both the districts on August 16 in protest against the blast.

Violence erupted in Dhemaji after the killing of the schoolchildren and there were protests against the "security lapse." Police resorted to blank fire and fired teargas shells to disperse crowds which laid siege to the DC's office.

PTI reports:

Soon after the blast, Mr. Gogoi said the Armed Forces Special Powers Act should stay in disturbed areas. The increasing activities by insurgent groups proved its relevance, he said.

He admitted there was a "serious security lapse" resulting in the killing of the innocent schoolchildren and reiterated that a district-wise contingency action plan was required to combat insurgency.

A New Delhi report said the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, asserted that perpetrators of the blast would not be spared and the country was determined to eliminate terrorism. He said in a statement that "such dastardly acts show the terrorists' callous disregard for innocent lives."

THE HINDU

16 AUG 2008

NSCN(IM) sings peace tune, wants conflict to end

Kohima
14 AUGUST

9-128 87
THE NSCN(IM) on Saturday expressed hope that the Union government would respect the "rights and wishes of the Nagas" to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution to the political problem at the earliest. In a message on the occasion of Naga Independence Day on Saturday, NSCN(IM) chairman Issac Chishi Swu said: "We see the present opportunity as the best for both sides to end the conflict."

After two days of discussions last month in the Thai city of Chiang Mei, representatives of the Centre and NSCN(IM) had decided to extend the period of ceasefire in Na-



galand for another year and resolved to continue peace dialogues for finding an amicable settlement to the protracted conflict. Mr Swu also thanked the previous NDA government for "accepting and recognising the uniqueness of Naga history and situation."

"Political chair may change but the issue remains the same. We hope, as the Opposition of the

UPA government, they will continue to play positive role in solving the longstanding Naga political problem," the NSCN(IM) chief maintained. On August 14, 1947, the then Naga National Council had declared Naga Independence and since then all Naga underground organisations have been observing this day, a day ahead of the country's Independence Day. Issac Swu said the Congress-led UPA government has "boldly picked up the thread" from where the previous government left.

"In keeping their commitment to the peace process and confirming that no new conditions have been imposed, NSCN hopes the Centre will respect the rights and wishes of the Nagas," the message said. —PTI

9/7/85 Manipur imbroglio 10/8 51-9

MANIPUR chief minister Ibobi Singh appears to be doing everything possible to save his government. He withdrew the Disturbed Areas Act, which empowers the use of the controversial Armed Forces Special Powers Act from the municipal limits of the capital of Imphal and even denounced the armed forces. News reported quote him as saying that the people of the state had "been facing atrocities... by the Army, military and security forces for the last 24 years" under the AFSPA. The public agitation fuelled by the custodial death of Manorama Devi, a 32-year-old woman in Imphal, appears unrelenting.

Most official responses have been piecemeal and confusing, if not contradictory - whether from the state or the Centre. Thus, the Centre through home minister Shivraj Patil says it is moving the Assam Rifles out of Imphal and replacing it with the Border Security Force. But his colleague, defence minister Pranab Mukherjee, had insisted earlier that there was no such move. The structural command of the Assam Rifles comes under the ministry of home affairs but it is operationalised by the defence ministry. Patil was non-committal on a possible withdrawal of the AFSPA. However, the appointment of Jarnail Singh, former additional secretary in the Prime Minister's Office, and a man with a sensitive understanding and experience of Manipur, as chief secretary, is a good move.

But neither adhocism nor agitations can last. The confrontation must end: the people of Manipur have made their point, clearly, loudly and in the process brought an insensitive state government to its knees and shaken the Centre. They have suffered in the process but can claim victory in forcing the Assam Rifles to quit Kangla fort, a symbol of Manipuri tradition. If Manipur is to recover, a course has to be charted and it has to be done in partnership between the Centre, the state and public organisations. It's time to talk, again, and enable fresh, young political leaders to take charge.

THE STATESMAN

‘কালী আইন’ নিয়ে সরব নাগাল্যান্ড

অশোক সেনগুপ্ত • গুয়াহাটী

১৩ অগস্ট: এ বার নাগাল্যান্ড। ‘কালী আইন’ প্রত্যাহারের দাবিতে সরব হল মণিপুরের প্রতিবেশী নাগাল্যান্ড। কোহিমায় শুরু হয়েছে প্রতিবাদ-বিক্ষোভ। মণিপুর কালচারাল সোসাইটি (এমসিএস)-সহ কিছু সংগঠন অবিলম্বে এই আইন তুলে নিয়ে উত্তর-পূর্বে শান্তি ফিরিয়ে আনতে সেনাবাহিনীর বিশেষ ক্ষমতা আইন প্রত্যাহারের আবেদন জানিয়েছে সরকারের কাছে। প্রতিবাদে সামিল হয়েছে নাগা ছাত্র সংগঠন (এনএ এ)। একই দাবি জানিয়েছেন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী নেইফিউ রিও।

নাগাল্যান্ডে ‘আর্মড ফোর্সেস স্পেশাল পাওয়ার অ্যাক্ট’ (এএফএসপিএ) প্রত্যাহারের দাবিতে এমসিএস ডিমাপুরে বিক্ষোভ সমাবেশের পর নাগাল্যান্ডের রাজ্যপাল শ্যামল দত্তের কাছে একটি স্মারকলিপি দিয়েছে।

সংগঠনের সভাপতি আর কে মেহতা সিংহ জানান, নাগরিকদের রক্ষার নামে এই আইন তাদের সামনে

অর্ধনৈমিত্তিক দুর্দশা থেকে আনছে।

কেবল নাগাল্যান্ড নয়, উত্তর পূর্ব থেকে কালী আইন প্রত্যাহারের আন্দোলনে শামিল হতে বিভিন্ন স্বেচ্ছাসেবী সংগঠনকে অনুপ্রাণিত করেছে মেহতা সিংহ।

কোহিমায় দ্বিতীয় বিশ্বযুদ্ধের স্মারক-সরোবরের সামনে এক সমাবেশ করেন। ‘ইবোবি, মণিপুরের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী থাকার নৈতিক অধিকার তোমার নেই’, ‘তুমিও তো মায়ের সন্তান, মায়ের সন্তান রাখ’— এই ধরনের নানা স্লোগান ছিল তাদের মুখে এবং হাতের ব্যানারে।

নব্বইয়ের দশকের মাঝপর্বে নাগাল্যান্ডের আন্তর্জাতিক সীমান্তের পাঁচ কিলোমিটার অংশ জুড়ে ওই আইন প্রয়োগ করা হয়। কেন্দ্র পর্যায়ক্রমে সারা রাজ্যে এটা চালু করতে চাইলে একের পর এক বিক্ষোভ-আন্দোলন শুরু হয়। একাধিক বন্ধ হয়।

এতে বিধায়কেরাও শামিল হন। কেন্দ্র এই আইন প্রত্যাহারে রাজি হয়। যে দিন তা প্রত্যাহারের কথা ছিল, তার আগে রাতে অজ্ঞাত পরিচয় এক দল

লোক নাগা মাদার্স ব্যাপ্টিস্ট চার্চ-এ আশ্রয় নিয়ে দেয়। এর পরে আপত্তি উপেক্ষা করে সমগ্র নাগাল্যান্ডে জারি হয় এই ‘কালী আইন’। রাজ্য প্রতি বছরের মতো এই বছরেও এই আইনের মেয়াদের পুনর্নবীকরণে আপত্তি জানিয়েছে।

নাগাল্যান্ডের প্রবীনতম বিধায়ক তথা নগর উন্নয়ন মন্ত্রী শুরহোজলি এই আইনকে ‘ভয়াবহ’ ও ‘বীভৎস’ বলে উল্লেখ করেন। তিনি বলেন, “কেবল মণিপুর বা নাগাল্যান্ড নয়, সমগ্র উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চল থেকে এটা তুলে নেওয়া উচিত।”

তিনি বলেন, অরবিন্দ দাতে রাজ্যপালের দায়িত্ব হস্তান্তরের মুখে বিধানসভা অনির্দিষ্টকালের জন্য মুলতুবি করে ঠিক কাজ করেনি। নয় রাজ্যপাল শিবেন্দ্র সিংহ সিধুর বিষয়টি পুনরিবেশনা করা উচিত।

এই সব দাবি ওঠার আগেই মুখ্যমন্ত্রী নেইফিউ রিও কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাতিলের সঙ্গে দেখা করে নাগাল্যান্ড থেকে এএফএসপিএ প্রত্যাহারের আর্জি জানিয়েছেন।

ধর্ষণের দায়ে কোর্ট মার্শাল দুই জওয়ানের

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, গুয়াহাটী, ১৩

অগস্ট: অসমের কোকরাঝাড়ে এক দুই জওয়ানকে শাস্তি দেওয়া হল। আজ সেনা-কর্তৃপক্ষ সরকারি এই সিদ্ধান্তের কথা জানিয়েছেন। মণিপুরে মনোরমা-কান্তের জেরে ‘কোর্ট অব এনকোয়ারি’ শুরু না করা গেলেও অসমের এই সিদ্ধান্ত বিভিন্ন মহলে বিশেষ গুরুত্ব পেয়েছে।

গোড়ায় এই অভিযোগের ব্যাপারে সেনা-কর্তৃপক্ষ গুরুত্ব দিতে চাননি। কিন্তু অভিযোগের প্রতিবাদে এলাকার বাসিন্দারা বন্ধ পালন করেন।

কোকরাঝাড়ের সাংসদ এবং প্রাক্তন ‘বড়ো লিবারেশন টাইগার’ উখরা গাওরা ব্রহ্ম এই ব্যাপারে উচ্চ পর্যায়ের তদন্তের দাবি জানান। আজ সেনা বিবৃতিতে বলা হয়েছে, হাবিলদার সতীশ কুমার এবং রাইফেলম্যান রাজেন্দ্র কুমার ‘সামারি জেনারেল কোর্ট মার্শাল’ অভিযুক্ত সার্বাস্ত করা হয়েছে। তাদের চাকরি থেকে বরখাস্ত করে ১০ বছরের সশ্রম কারাদণ্ডের

আদেশ দেওয়া হয়েছে।

সেনা-কর্তৃপক্ষ এই সঙ্গে বলেছেন, “এই রকম দৃষ্টান্তমূলক কড়া ব্যবস্থা নেওয়ার কারণ, কোনও সেনাকর্মীর উৎখালতা কর্তৃপক্ষ কোনও ভাবে বরদাস্ত করবেন না, এটা সবাইকে বুঝিয়ে দেওয়া।” এই রকম প্রতিটি অভিযোগ খতিয়ে দেখার আশ্বাসও দিয়েছেন কর্তৃপক্ষ। ‘রেকর্ড সময়ের মধ্যে’ এই তদন্ত এবং বিচার সম্পন্ন হয়েছে বলেও দাবি করেছেন কর্তৃপক্ষ।

পুলিশ সূত্রের খবর, গত ২৯ জুন রাতে গোসাইগাঁও রেল স্টেশনের কাছে পদম পুখরি গ্রামে এক টহলদার বাহিনী এক যুবতীকে তাঁর স্বামীর কাছ থেকে টেনে নিয়ে ধর্ষণ করে বলে অভিযোগ ওঠে। সার ডিভিশনাল পুলিশ অফিসার এস আর মিলি জানান, ছুটি থেকে কাজে যোগ দিতে আসা কয়েকজন সহকর্মীকে নিয়ে আসার জন্য তিন জওয়ান শিবিরের বাইরে আসে। তারা সকলেই ইলোভেশ্ব জম্মু আন্ড কাশ্মীর লাইট ইনফ্যান্ট্রি রেজিমেন্টের রক্ষী।

ANANDARAYAN PATRIKA

14 AUG 20

Manipur lifts Act from parts of Imphal

HD-1 9-11 SA 128

IMPHAL, AUG. 12. The Manipur Chief Minister, Okram Ibobi Singh, today announced the repeal of the controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 from the Imphal municipal area. The decision, taken at a State Cabinet meeting at the Chief Minister's office here earlier in the day, was announced by Mr. Singh at a press conference.

Agitation 'justifiable'

Terming as "justifiable" the month-long public agitation in the State after the killing of Thangjam Manorama Devi, the Chief Minister said: "My Government feels for the people's sentiments."

"Though we cannot fulfil the desires of the people 100 per cent, we honour them. The State Cabinet has resolved to lift the Act from the Imphal municipal area first on a trial basis," he said.

The Imphal municipal area covers the Assembly constituencies of Uripok, Thangmeiband, Sagolband, Khurai, Singjamei, Keishamthong and Yaikul, which have 10 per cent of the State's total population.

Referring to the public demand for the complete withdrawal of the Act, Mr. Singh said, "we don't want the Act for a minute more in the State, but there are lots of compulsions."

'Centre watching developments'

By Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI, AUG. 12. A crucial meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) tonight decided to watch the developments in Manipur where the Congress-led Ibobi Singh Government withdrew the controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act from the municipal limits of Imphal city on a trial basis earlier in the day.

"We are watching the developments in the State and are aware of the situation there," the Defence Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, and the Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, told presspersons after the two-hour long meeting of the CCPA at 7, Race Course Road here.

See also Page 11

especially the presence of many unlawful organisations pushing for secession from India."

According to Mr. Singh, the decision was taken without the Centre's approval.

"Though the decision has been conveyed to the Centre, it remains to be seen how they would react," he said. "The Centre also feels that it is not just a law and order problem, but involves secessionist forces, and hence they pose a question, a threat to national integrity. National integrity is above all and so they cannot compromise."

Normal life in Imphal and the four hill districts came to a standstill today as a result of a bandh called separately by various organisations.

Life in the hill districts — Senapati, Ukhrul, Tamenglong and Churachandpur — was severely affected due to the 12-hour hill districts bandh called by different student bodies, including the All-Tribal Students Union Manipur and the All-Naga Students Association of Manipur. — PTI, UNI

Partial lifting won't help: Page 11



BURNING ISSUE: Protesters set ablaze tyres to block the National Highway-39 at Chingmeirong on the outskirts of Imphal on Thursday during the bandh called by various organisations, demanding the removal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. — PTI

দিপ্লিমেটকে উপেক্ষা করেই বিতর্কিত আইন প্রত্যাহার ইফলে

১৫/৮/৪৮
১৫/৮/৪৮

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, ইফল ও নয়াদিল্লি, ১২ অগস্ট: প্রবল গণবিক্ষোভের সামনে নতি স্বীকার করে মণিপুর সরকার শেষ পর্যন্ত রাজধানী ইফলের পূর্ব-এলাকা থেকে 'সশস্ত্র বাহিনীর বিশেষ ক্ষমতা আইন' প্রত্যাহার করার সিদ্ধান্ত ঘোষণা করল। কার্যত কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারকে উপেক্ষা করেই মণিপুরের কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্বাধীন সরকার এই সিদ্ধান্ত নিল। কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্বাধীন সরকার দিল্লিতে আসীন হওয়ার পরে দুটি কংগ্রেস শাসিত রাজ্য কেন্দ্রকে অস্বীকার করে নিজেদের পথে হাটল। এর আগে পঞ্জাবে অমরিন্দর সিংহ সরকার বিধানসভায় জল-চুক্তি বাতিল করে দিয়ে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারকে অস্বস্তিতে ফেলেছিল। আজ মণিপুর সরকার এই সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ায় মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বাদল নিয়ে দিল্লিতে জল্পনা-কল্পনা শুরু হয়ে গিয়েছে।

মণিপুর মন্ত্রিসভার বৈঠকে সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার পরেই আজ সরকারি বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারি করে জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়, ইফল পূর্ব অঞ্চলের সাতটি বিধানসভা এলাকা (রাজ্যের মোট জনসংখ্যার ১০.২৭ শতাংশ) থেকে এই আইন প্রত্যাহৃত হল। দিল্লির ইচ্ছাকে অগ্রাহ্য করে মণিপুর সরকার এ ভাবে একতরফা সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া সত্ত্বেও সেখানকার বাস্তব অবস্থার দিকে নজর রেখে আপাতত কেন্দ্র এই ঘটনাকে উপেক্ষা করতে চাইছে। আজ রাতেই প্রধানমন্ত্রীর নেতৃত্বে বৈঠকে বসে কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভার রাজনীতি বিষয়ক কমিটি। প্রায় দু'ঘণ্টার বৈঠকে অবশ্য পরবর্তী পদক্ষেপ সম্পর্কে কোনও সিদ্ধান্ত হয়নি। বৈঠকে প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী প্রব মুখোপাধ্যায়, স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল, অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরম ছাড়াও ছিলেন সেনাপ্রধান এন সি ভিঞ্জ ও ডিরেক্টর জেনারেল অফ মিলিটারি অপারেশনস। রাজ্যের পরিস্থিতি সম্পর্কে তাঁরা সরকারকে অবহিত



৩৯ এ জাতীয় সড়কে টায়ার গুড়িয়ে বন্ধ সমর্থকদের অবরোধ। বৃহস্পতিবার, ইফলের কাছে। — পি টি আই

দারিতে বিক্ষোভ আন্দোলন চলছে। আজ শুধু ইফল থেকে সামরিক ও আধাসামরিক বাহিনীর বিশেষ ক্ষমতা তুলে নেওয়ার খবরেও আপোলন শান্ত হওয়ার লক্ষণ নেই। বরং সঙ্কার খবর, রাজ্যের অন্যত্র বিক্ষোভ প্রবল হচ্ছে, রাজ্যে রাস্তায় আশুন জ্বলছে। উল্লেখ্য, গত ১১ জুলাই মনোরমা দেবী নামে এক মহিলাকে অসম রাইফেলসের জওয়ানরা বাড়ি থেকে তুলে নিয়ে যাওয়ার পরে তার মৃতদেহ দুই কিলোমিটার দূরে পাওয়া যায়। অসম রাইফেলসের জওয়ানদের বিরুদ্ধে মনোরমা দেবী অভিযোগ এনে আন্দোলনকারীরা ওই তুলে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বিক্ষোভ থামাতে আশ্বাস দিয়েছিলেন, ১৫ অগস্টের আগেই তিনি এ ব্যাপারে যা করার করবেন।

মুখ্যমন্ত্রী আজ বলেন, রাজ্যে বর্তমানে যে বিক্ষোভ চলছে তার জন্য দায়ী জওয়ানদের মাত্রাছাড়া আচরণ। কেন্দ্র নারাজ, অগত্যা রাজ্যকেই এই বিশেষ আইন তুলে নেওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে হল। কিন্তু কেন্দ্রের অনুমোদন ছাড়া রাজ্য সরকার একক ভাবে এই আইন তুলে নিতে পারে কি না, তা ইফল ও দিল্লি, কেউই স্পষ্ট করেনি। মুখ্যমন্ত্রী অবশ্য দাবি করেন, "উপক্রমত এলাকা আইন রাজ্য সরকার যখন মুশি জারি করতে পারে, প্রত্যাহারও করতে পারে। আমরা সেই অনুযায়ীই প্রত্যাহার করেছি।" তিনি এও বলেন, "কেন্দ্রের অনুমোদন চেয়েছি, কেন্দ্রকে বোঝাচ্ছি।" ইবোবি কংগ্রেসেরই সদস্য। মণিপুরের সঙ্কট নিয়ে দিল্লিতে স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল আজ সন্ধ্যা গাথীর সঙ্গে বৈঠক করেন। বিশেষ আইন প্রত্যাহার করে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ইবোবি সিংহ আপাতত নিজের সরকারকে বাঁচাতে পারলেন। কারণ, এক দিকে কেন্দ্র তাঁরই মন্ত্রী দেশেন্দ্র ও রাজসভার সদস্য ও প্রাক্তন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী রিশাং কেইসিং-এর সঙ্গে দিল্লিতে কথা বলছে। মন্ত্রী বীরেন সিংহের মন্তব্য, "শুনতে পাচ্ছিলাম, হাইকমান্ড নেতা বদলানোর চেষ্টায় এ সব করছে। এখন মুখ্যমন্ত্রীকে গদি ছাড়তে হলেও তিনি মণিপুরের মানুষের কাছে যিরো হয়ে যাবেন।" কিন্তু গোটা রাজ্য থেকে উপক্রমত এলাকা আইন প্রত্যাহারের দাবিতে স্থানীয় জওহরলাল নেহরু হাসপাতালে দুই বছর ধরে অনশরিত (তাঁকে জোর করে খাওয়ানো হচ্ছে) ইরম ছানু শর্মিলাকে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী অনশরিত রাজি করতে পারেননি। মুখ্যমন্ত্রী নিজে হাসপাতালে গিয়ে শর্মিলাকে এ নিয়ে অনুরোধ করলেও তিনি গোটা রাজ্য থেকে বিশেষ আইন প্রত্যাহারের দাবিতে অনড়। পরে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বলেন, "ওঁর দাবি এখনই মানা আমাদের পক্ষে সম্ভব নয়।"

রাইফেলসের জওয়ানদের বিরুদ্ধে মনোরমা দেবীকে অংশ এখনও উপক্রমত আইনের আওতায় রাখা হবে। মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বিক্ষোভ থামাতে আশ্বাস দিয়েছিলেন, ১৫ অগস্টের আগেই তিনি এ ব্যাপারে যা করার করবেন।

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

2 AUG 2001

Special powers

5/12/8 No reprieve for Manipuris 9/11/8

With Union home minister Shivraj Patil announcing Manipur's need for the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act until "full normalcy returns" and defence minister Pranab Mukherjee's assertion that there would be "no rethinking" on the Centre's part, Manipuris must continue to endure what cannot be cured. And instead of a compromise solution, the state administration is told to put a lid on protests against the Act. The Congress-led UPA government has saved itself embarrassment by not imposing President's Rule when governor SS Sidhu prorogued the assembly on the day he assumed office to pre-empt a bid by Congress legislators to pass a resolution to lift the Act.

But being incorrigible battlers for a cause, the Manipuri women are unlikely to abandon their protests and mar a winning tradition. Exactly a century ago, they defied the British political agent's ordering Manipuris to carry teak from the Kabaw Valley (now in Myanmar) to reconstruct his assistant's bungalow as punishment for burning it down the previous year.

In 1939, they prevented the British attempt to export paddy — a scarcity had been created — for husking outside the state. Meira Paibis (torchbearers), still roam villages at night to catch pot-valiants. If some women resorted to a naked protest last month, it looks like a staged protest that is far from common — they could be merely letting off steam against the Centre's failure to redress their grievances.

While it is true that it was meant to malign the Army and was done at the instance of militant groups, such public acts of defiance do not stem from small causes. The alleged abuse and killing of Thangjam Manorama Devi by Assam Rifles personnel last month, however, is not the first to inflame public sentiment against the Act. In August 1996 a handicapped boy watched his mother being abused. In February 1997, a 15-year-old schoolboy duly arrested, was allegedly killed in custody. There is still no sign of the 15-year old schoolboy picked up in February 1998. The Army admitted that it had arrested him but said he escaped. In April 1998, a woman was allegedly raped by jawans in the presence of her child. In June 1998, a martial arts expert who was "apprehended", disappeared without a trace.

Recently a young girl in Jiribam subdivision committed suicide after allegedly being molested by security force personnel. There have been at least four major incidents of innocents killed in retaliation. Power-hungry politicians are to blame for a situation that necessitates the Army's involvement in counter-insurgency and internal security operations.

But having now put its foot down, Delhi must clearly define what the Army's role is in civilian duties. This assumes importance because in the next few months the Centre and NSCN-IM are to resume peace talks. Though no agenda has been fixed, Manipur is bound to erupt if Delhi barter away its territory to meet Nagas' demand for integration.

আলফা-কেন্দ্র চুক্তি হচ্ছে

রাজখোয়ার সঙ্গে বিদেশে বেঠকের চেষ্টা

জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল ● নয়াদিল্লি

১০ অগস্ট: ঠিক যে ভাবে নাগা জঙ্গি সংগঠন এন এস সি এন (আই এম) নেতা মুইভার সঙ্গে কথা চলছে কেন্দ্রের, অদূর ভবিষ্যতে সে ভাবেই আলফা নেতা অরবিন্দ রাজখোয়ার সঙ্গে বিদেশের মাটিতে বৈঠক হতে পারে।

রাজীব গাঁধী অসম গণ পরিষদের সঙ্গে অসম চুক্তি করেছিলেন ১৯৮৫ সালে। উনিশ বছর পরে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার আলফার সঙ্গে নতুন চুক্তি করার পরিকল্পনা নিয়েছে। প্রধানমন্ত্রী এই কৌশল রূপায়ণের দায়িত্ব দিয়েছেন প্রতিরক্ষা মন্ত্রকের প্রতিমন্ত্রী ও অসমের কংগ্রেস নেতা বিজয় হাভিককে। এই কৌশলের গুরুত্বপূর্ণ দিক হল অরবিন্দ রাজখোয়াকে শান্তি প্রক্রিয়ায় যুক্ত করে অন্য জঙ্গি নেতা পরেশ বরুয়াকে বিচ্ছিন্ন করে দেওয়া। এই দুই নেতাই এখন বাংলাদেশে আত্মগোপন করে আছেন বলে স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রক সূত্রের খবর।

এই সম্ভাব্য শান্তি-চুক্তি নিয়ে আলফা নেতৃত্বের মধ্যে মত-পার্থক্য আছে। পরেশ বরুয়ার সঙ্গে বিদেশি শক্তির যোগাযোগ অনেক বেশি। অন্য দিকে, অসমে না-থাকলেও অরবিন্দ সেখানে রাজনৈতিক শক্তির প্রধান কাণ্ডারী হয়ে উঠতে চান।

হাভিক সম্প্রতি জোরহাটের তিতাবোরে অরবিন্দের বাড়ি গিয়ে তাঁর স্বাধীনতা সংগ্রামী বাবার সঙ্গেও দেখা করেছেন। এখনই কেন্দ্রের সঙ্গে আলোচনায় বসতে আলফা নেতৃত্বের কাছে প্রকাশ্য আবেদন জানিয়েছেন হাভিক। অসমের সঙ্গে ওতপ্রোত ভাবে জড়িত একটি স্বেচ্ছাসেবী সংগঠনের কর্তাও বিবৃতি দিয়ে আলফা নেতাদের কাছে একই আবেদন জানান। কিন্তু তার প্রতিবাদ করে পরেশ বরুয়া উল্টে বলে দেন যে, 'র'-এর মতো গোয়েন্দা সংস্থার প্রতিনিধিদের সঙ্গে তাঁরা আলোচনায় বসবেন না।

মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার গঠনের পরেই আলফা নেতৃত্বের সঙ্গে আলোচনায় বসার প্রস্তাব নিয়ে সনিয়া গাঁধী, কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল এবং প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায়ের সঙ্গে কথা বলেন হাভিক। মন্ত্রিসভার নিরাপত্তা বিষয়ক কমিটিতেও আলফার কার্যকলাপ নিয়ে বিস্তারিত আলোচনা হয়। সেখানেই গোয়েন্দা-রিপোর্টের ভিত্তিতে সকলে

একমত হন যে, ভুটানে সেনা অভিযানের পর আলফার সংগঠন খুবই দুর্বল হয়ে গিয়েছে।

আলফা নেতৃত্বের সঙ্গে আলোচনায় বসার জন্য এটাই উপযুক্ত সময়। কিন্তু হাভিকের প্রকাশ্য আবেদনের সঙ্গে সঙ্গেই পরেশ বরুয়া গোষ্ঠী অসমে আবার বিচ্ছিন্ন সন্ত্রাস শুরু করে দিয়েছে, যাতে কেন্দ্রের এই প্রচেষ্টা বানচাল হয়ে যায়। অসমের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী তরুণ গগৈ নিজেও এই চুক্তি করতে বিশেষ ভাবে আগ্রহী। এই চুক্তির সাফল্য দেখিয়ে অ গ প-কে কোনঠাসা করে তিনি পরবর্তী বিধানসভা নির্বাচনে যেতে চান।

কেন্দ্র-রাজ্যের এই প্রচেষ্টা ভুল করতে উজান-অসমে জঙ্গিদের মরিয়া কার্যকলাপ শুরু হয়েছে। গত দেড় মাসে ডিব্রুগড়, তিনসুকিয়া, শিবসাগর প্রভৃতি স্থানে নাশকতামূলক কাজকর্ম আবার শুরু হয়ে গিয়েছে। ভুটান থেকে তাড়া খেয়ে অনেক জঙ্গি এখন মেঘালয় এবং মায়ানমারের জঙ্গলে আশ্রয় নিয়েছে। এন এস সি এন (খাপলাং) গোষ্ঠীর সঙ্গেও আলফা জঙ্গিদের সম্পর্ক এখন ভাল, যদিও মুইভার সঙ্গে পরেশ বরুয়ার সম্পর্ক আপাতত ভাল নয়। ছাবুয়াতেও তাপবিদ্যুৎ কেন্দ্র সম্প্রতি আলফা উড়িয়ে দিয়েছে। শান্তি চুক্তির প্রস্তুতি চালাতে গিয়ে নতুন সরকার তাই বেশ ধাক্কা খেয়েছে। এই জন্য প্রকাশ্যে আর কোনও আবেদন না-জানিয়ে পুরো বিষয়টি গোপনে এগিয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে মন্ত্রিসভার নিরাপত্তা বিষয়ক কমিটি। আলফার কার্যকলাপ সম্পর্কে বিশদে তথ্য সংগ্রহ করছেন গোয়েন্দারা। বন্যার জন্য অবশ্য অসমে জঙ্গি কার্যকলাপ আপাতত কম।

এমতাবস্থায় কেন্দ্র অসমের এক প্রবীণ সাংবাদিককে এই শান্তি চুক্তির মধ্যস্থতার জন্য নির্বাচন করার কথা ঠিক করেছে। আলফার প্রধান দাবি তিনটি— ● পৃথক সার্বভৌম রাষ্ট্র ● রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের পর্যবেক্ষক নিয়োগ করে সমাধানসূত্র বার করা ● অন্য কোনও দেশে আলোচনা।

কেন্দ্র বিদেশে আলোচনায় বসতে রাজি, কিন্তু অন্য দু'টি প্রস্তাব মানতে রাজি নয়। কেন্দ্র সুবাস ঘিসিংয়ের পার্বত্য পরিষদের ধাঁচে আলফা নেতাদের স্বায়ত্তশাসন দিতে আগ্রহী। তবে এ-ও জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে, আলোচনা শুরু হবে কোনও রকম শর্ত ছাড়াই।

Ulfa ready to talk sovereignty on India soil

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Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Aug. 9.— A day after Ulfa-triggered blasts rocked Assam, the banned outfit has agreed to give up its precondition of holding talks in a third country under the supervision of UN representatives. However, it has stuck to its demand for "sovereignty" to Assam.

While talking to a local daily here over phone, self-styled commander-in-chief of the banned organisation Mr Paresh Barua said: "If the government of India is ready to discuss our demand for sovereignty, we are game for holding dialogue even in Assam's capital at Dispur."

The fugitive Ulfa leader stated that the outfit does not require the service of any mediator to open a channel of communication with the government if the latter was ready to discuss the issue of sovereignty.

"No mediator is required. In this age of high-speed communication and Internet, we do not need any mediation. We already have everybody's telephone numbers. But the issue here is whether the Indian government is willing to discuss the sovereignty of Assam. As long as they are ready to talk on that issue, so are we," the daily quoted the Ulfa leader as saying.

Through the statement of its supreme commander, the Ulfa has declared that it has cut down its

preconditions for possible peace talks with the government to just one — the issue of sovereignty. This is a clear departure from the outfit's earlier rigid stand that peace talks with the government are possible only if they are held in a third country and under the supervision of UN representatives.

The Ulfa leader stated that its demand for a "sovereign Assam" is not merely a political wish as the outfit believed that it is achievable. He cited the example of Istanbul, which had attained independence after years of armed struggle.

"We are not the ones to give up on our dream of an independent Assam. We will continue with our struggle for hundred years or even

more, if need be, to achieve our objective," he said.

Dismissing all speculations of a possible rift in the top leadership of the outfit, Barua termed these as "design of Indian Army" to weaken the outfit.

He said the outfit's chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa, general secretary Anup Chetia and he grew up together and had been associated with the banned outfit for a long time.

A similar statement was made by Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa a couple of months back.

However, the government did not respond to it. The Union minister of state for defence, Mr Bijoy

Krishna Handique, had recently stated here that the government would not respond to statements doled out to the media by Ulfa leaders. The minister had also ruled out the possibility of declaring a unilateral ceasefire with the outfit unless it was convinced that the Ulfa really wanted peace to be restored in the state.

Meanwhile, the North East Students Organisation, which is the banner organisation of several students unions from the north eastern states, has raised a demand for the declaration of a unilateral ceasefire against all the insurgent outfits in the region to pave the way for dialogue with the government.



A day after blasts triggered off by the Ulfa, BSF personnel keep vigil along the India-Bangladesh border as part of a security drive. — PTI

10 AUG 2004

Ulfa strikes in CM's constituency

Six IED explosions in Titabor, night curfew imposed along border

Press Trust of India
Jorhat (Assam), August 8

IN A major strike, Ulfa militants on Sunday exploded six powerful improvised explosive devices (IED) in two transmission towers of Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (PGCIL) and Assam State Electricity Board (ASEB) in Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi's constituency in Titabor of Jorhat district.

The militants had planted four IEDs under the 400-KV posts of the PGCIL tower, transmitting power from Kathalguri to Misa in Nagaon district, with three exploding and damaging the tower, Jorhat police said. Another three IEDs were

placed under the three posts of the 130-KV ASEB tower, which transmits power from Mariani to Dimapur and all exploded completely damaging the posts. No casualty was reported as the explosion took place before dawn and there was nobody around the incident site bordering Nagaland near the Govindpur Tea Estate, Kumar said.

Two unexploded IEDs, weighing half a kg each, several batteries and 150 metres of open wire were recovered from the blast site. The blasts came a few days before the Independence Day, which the militant outfit has always opposed by launching major offensives.



Tarun Gogoi

The PGCIL and ASEB towers transmit power generated by the Neepeo and the blasts were likely to affect power supply to both Nagaland and Lower Assam areas. "Power supply has not been affected immedi-

ately, but it will be in short supply for the next few days as the posts have to be repaired", PGCIL and ASEB engineers at the blast site said. The actual cost of the damages due to the explosion was being assessed by the engineers and was likely to run into several lakhs.

Jorhat Deputy Commissioner J. Shyamalan Rao and DIG (Eastern Range) Bhaskarjyoti Mahanta have rushed to the area and the entire town has been cordoned off. Security has been beefed up with all entry and exit points to the town sealed off and patrolling by the paramilitary forces has been intensified.

Night curfew has been imposed along the Assam-

Nagaland border and pillion riding has been banned in the town.

"The blast was triggered off to create panic, cause losses to the companies and destabilise the Chief Minister's constituency", the Jorhat DC said.

An intensive combing operation has been launched along the Assam-Nagaland border to arrest the militants and prevent their escape, he added.

Shyamalan Rao added that security in the area would be maintained at an all-time high in the run-up to the Independence Day celebrations. Every year, the Ulfa militants hinder the August 15 functions in the state.

Manipur situation volatile

19-1/9 ● Call for total shutdown from today

By Siddhant Varadarajan

IMPHAL, AUG. 8. The ongoing Manipur-wide mass agitation against the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act is likely to escalate this week with the 32 organisations spearheading the campaign calling upon all Government offices to shut down indefinitely from Monday. Also being contemplated in the run up to the August 15 'deadline' for revocation of the Act: a complete 'ban' on public transport, traffic on the highways and the arrival and departure of flights. The aim, one of the leaders of the agitation told *The Hindu*, is to cut off Manipur from the 'mainland' until the Centre agrees to withdraw the draconian law.

Though essential services have been exempted from the

bandh call, even a partial shutdown of Government offices will mean a huge erosion of authority for the Congress-led O. Ibobi Singh administration.

Disciplinary action

Disciplinary action has been threatened but public sentiment on the issue is running so high after the custodial killing last month of Manorama Devi by the Assam Rifles that Government employees will find it hard to defy the movement's call. This is, after all, a State where even Marwari and other shopkeepers whose forefathers migrated here from elsewhere in India, downed their shutters to stage a noisy dharna against the AFSPA on Saturday.

After flirting with the popular demand for revocation of the

AFSPA and promising some relief by August 15, the Chief Minister appears now, in the face of the Centre's steadfast refusal for any change in the *status quo*, to be having second thoughts. A close aide of the Chief Minister told this reporter on Sunday that "the conditions prevailing in the State at the present time are not conducive to the lifting of the Act."

Until last week, it seemed as if Mr. Ibobi Singh was thinking of defying the Centre and removing the tag of 'disturbed area' from all or some parts of Manipur, thereby rendering the AFSPA defunct. Under the Act, the Centre can overrule the State.

Mass movement

On the street, there is a general expectation that the situation

will rapidly deteriorate once the August 15 'deadline' comes and goes. Asked what form the mass movement would take, one of the leaders of 32 organisations campaigning against the AFSPA told *The Hindu*, "Until now, people have only been calling for withdrawal of the Act, and of the Army. The next stage will be to call for independence."

State officials share this assessment, arguing that the insurgent groups are taking advantage of the Centre's apathy to further their own demands. "The situation is very, very volatile," said one senior officer. "I hope the Government has a plan. I hope they can offer the people something before August 15."

'Government should talk with agitators': Page 11

Don't act against Act, Manipur warned

Rajnish Sharma
New Delhi, August 7

THE CENTRE has asked the Manipur government not to take any hasty step on the contentious Armed Forces Special Powers Act. Sources said the Home Ministry has asked the state government not to convene a special session of the Assembly to withdraw the 'Disturbed Areas Status' in Manipur.

Political parties in Manipur are demanding withdrawal of the disturbed area notification. Currently, the AFSPA is in force in certain north-eastern states and Jammu and Kashmir, which have been declared "disturbed".

Officials maintain that the Centre can overrule any move by the state Assembly. But that could lead to an avoidable "constitutional crisis and an embarrassing situation" for the Centre. The Assembly, incidentally, has been prorogued.

The Centre has asked Manipur chief minister O Ibobi Singh to convene an all party meeting to make out a case against convening the special session of the Assembly. "If the state goes ahead with this move, it will strain Centre-State relations at a time when the situation is al-

ready very volatile. We have also advised the state to take out an all party peace rally that includes prominent citizens and NGOs," a senior ministry official added.

The Centre has also sent hints that it was working on a "formula" and was willing to withdraw the Act from certain districts in Manipur. The Act will only be restricted to certain militancy-prone areas.

One promise the Centre has made to the state relates to amendments in the law to provide for checking human rights violations.

Patil punch

In New Delhi, the Centre said the Armed Forces Act is "required" in Manipur "till normalcy returns" to the state, adds PTL. "Of course, the law is not applicable in all the states in the country. It is applicable to states where militancy has existed. Let normal return to this beautiful state of ours.... This (the act) may not be there," Home Minister Shivraj Patil said in reply to a question whether the Centre felt that Manipur required such a law.

"When the situation is not helpful, I think withdrawing the Act will create more difficulties," he said, adding

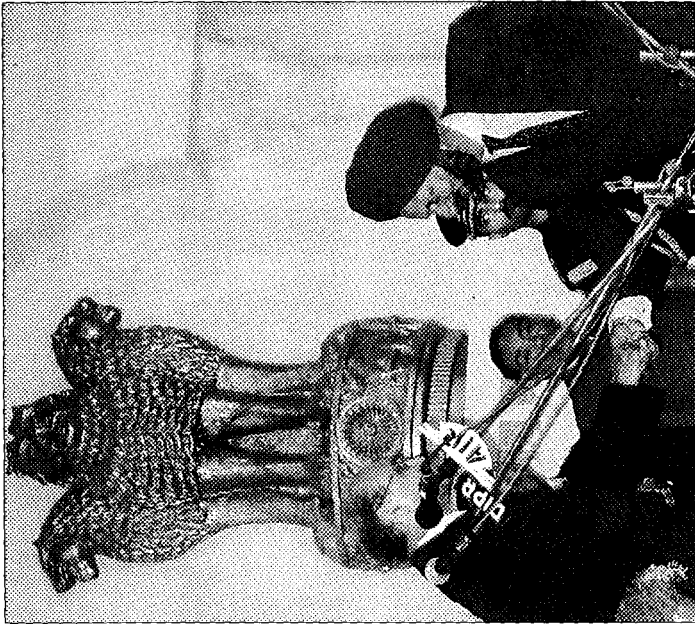
H. Khogen Singh
New Delhi, August 7

■ **March 1984:** Thirteen spectators watching a volleyball match are shot dead at Heirangoithong in Imphal when CRPF personnel at the venue are attacked by insurgents. Judicial inquiry finds the CRPF guilty of killing innocent civilians.

■ **January 1995:** Nine civilians are shot dead at the Regional Medical College in Imphal when CRPF jawans are attacked by militants. Judicial probe blames the CRPF for the killings.

■ **November 2000:** Ten civilians are killed after a bomb attack on an Assam Rifles convoy in Malom outside Imphal. Magisterial inquiry holds the Assam Rifles responsible for the killing of the civilians.

The history of counter-insurgency operations in Manipur, as in the rest of the north-east, is littered with instances of human rights abuses and atrocities. But the three incidents can be counted among the worst. The atrocities have only been compounded by inaction against the erring securitymen. "No action was taken against the Assam Ri-



PTI
New Manipur Governor Dr Shivender Singh Sidhu after the sweating-in at Raj Bhavan in Imphal on Friday.

manipur worsened today. Hundreds of agitators, attempting to court mass arrest, clashed with the police at several places. The protesters have threatened to shut down all government offices from Monday.

Police firing

Over 30 people were injured, three of them in police firing, as the situation in Ma-

retreated".

The commission found the killing of a Manipuri Muslim rickshaw puller, who happened to be outside the medical college premises, particularly disgusting. In its report, the commission said a stray CRPF bullet hit the rickshaw puller and he "fell down shouting *Allah o' Allah*". When a CRPF jawan heard this, he shouted at the rickshaw puller: *Ya Allah!* and shot him again.

The judicial inquiry into the Heirangoithong incident, in which 13 innocent persons were killed, too found the CRPF personnel responsible for the deaths. But in this case too, none of the personnel was either arrested or charged with murder.

The incident took place during a volleyball match between the Manipur police and the BSF. A large crowd had gathered to watch the game. Some militants shot dead a CRPF jawan who was at the venue and decamped with his weapon.

His colleagues then went on the rampage. The judicial commission said the CRPF "fired several rounds upon the crowd of spectators" just to avenge their colleague's death.

Getting away with murder, as always

STATE OF CONFLICT MANIPUR

personnel for the Malom killings," admitted a former adviser to the Manipur governor.

In the RMC incident, the Justice D.M. Sen inquiry commission found the CRPF personnel responsible for the killing of nine innocent persons and recommended a CBI probe.

The CBI too had found the CRPF guilty. But besides registering cases against the erring jawans, the security-men went unpunished.

The RMC killings took place when insurgents shot a CRPF jawan at the medical college and fled. The jawan's colleagues then went on a shooting spree. In the commission words, the CRPF killed the nine civilians "after the militants had

Centre in no hurry to compromise on Manipur

By Siddharth Varadarajan

NEW DELHI, AUG. 4. The intensity and speed with which the political movement in Manipur against the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act has erupted has left the Manmohan Singh Government floundering for a response.

Senior Ministers acknowledge the situation in Manipur is grim, with large demonstrations and violent protests against the conduct of the armed forces taking place nearly everyday. There is a perception that something has to be done quickly to assuage sentiments there and improve the human rights situation.

Draconian law

But at the same time, the UPA Government is under pressure from within and without to avoid taking any step that might appear to be a concession to "extremism".

"The Centre has to be very firm regardless of public pressure," highly-placed sources told *The Hindu* on Wednesday. "There is no way that we can give in to the demand that the AFSPA be repealed. Because if

we do, there are bound to be similar demands from elsewhere."

But Manipuri leaders are unconvinced. "If the UPA Government is committed to the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), how can it defend the AFSPA which is far more draconian?" is a question many MLAs from the State ask.

Interim measures

Official sources do not rule out "interim measures" such as the establishment of an official panel to probe the workings of the AFSPA and the conduct of the armed forces in Manipur, but say the Act itself will not be repealed under the present circumstances.

Indeed, senior officials said Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was upset with Manipur Chief Minister Ibobi Singh for

adding his voice to the demand for repeal of the Act and campaigning in Delhi rather than returning to Imphal and taking measures to calm the situation.

In his meetings with Manipuri political leaders over the past few days, Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil is also understood to have reiterated this stand. "Patil told us there could be no revocation of the AFSPA until peace and tranquility returns to the State," an MLA allied to the Ibobi Singh-led coalition told *The Hindu*. He added that the Centre did not seem to understand just how uncertain the situation in Manipur now was. Asked whether public opinion

in the State would accept a partial lifting of the Act — one proposal doing the rounds is to remove all towns from its purview — the MLA said the time for half-measures might well be over. "At one time, people were demanding partial lifting of the Act but no one in Delhi listened. Now they are demanding its complete withdrawal. I am not sure how exactly the situation can be defused".

Rape suspected

The custodial killing last month of Thangjam Manorama by the Assam Rifles has fuelled popular outrage across Manipur cutting across political and ethnic lines. The Army says she was killed while attempting to escape but locals have questioned why 16 bullets were fired into her.

On Monday, Dr. Ksh Manogem, who conducted a second post-mortem in the case, testified before an official commission that Manorama had been shot in her genitals. This disclosure has lent credence to the public perception that soldiers might have raped her, and then shot in such a way as to destroy the evidence.

Centre plans panel to review situation

the situation to the Home Minister, Shivraj Patil.

However, Mr. Jaiswal clarified that "no final decision" had been taken on the formation of the committee. On the demand of the protestors for withdrawal of the Act, he said there had been no request from the State Government in this regard.

medial measures.

The Minister of State for Home Affairs, Shriprakash Jaiswal, told newsmen here today that the situation was not improving and there was an urgent need to take corrective measures. Mr. Jaiswal, who had visited North-Eastern States last week, said that he had already submitted a report on

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 4. Faced with protests demanding withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Manipur since last month, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government is planning a committee to review the situation in Manipur and suggest re-

বিক্ষোভে উত্তাল মণিপুর, দাবি মানতে নারাজ দিল্লি

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি ও আগরতলা, ৩ অগস্ট:
মণিপুরের মানুষের বিক্ষোভ আন্দোলন বেড়ে চললেও কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার ওই রাজ্য থেকে 'উপক্রম এলাকা আইন' এবং 'সশস্ত্র বাহিনীর বিশেষ ক্ষমতা আইন' প্রত্যাহারের দাবি মানতে রাজি নয়। প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ এ ব্যাপারে তাঁর মনোভাবের কথা বিরোধী দল ও সরকারের সমর্থক বামদলগুলিকে জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন। এ দিকে, আজও মণিপুরের রাজধানী ইফলে ওই আইন প্রত্যাহারের দাবিতে প্রচণ্ড বিক্ষোভ হয়েছে। বিক্ষোভকারীরা রাস্তায় নেমে সরাসরি পুলিশ ও আধাসামরিক বাহিনীর সঙ্গে সংঘর্ষ শুরু করলে নিরাপত্তা বাহিনী পরিস্থিতি আয়ত্তে আনতে অন্তত ২০ রাউন্ড গুলি চালায়। বেসরকারি সূত্রে অন্তত ৩২-৩৩ জন ছাত্রছাত্রী আহত হয়েছেন বলে দাবি করা হয়েছে। সন্ধ্যার পরেও সেখানে ইতস্তত খণ্ডযুদ্ধ চলছিল বলে খবর পাওয়া গিয়েছে। মণিপুরের মানুষের দাবির কাছে নতিস্বীকার করে রাজ্যের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী এবং সব ক'টি রাজনৈতিক দলই কেন্দ্রের কাছে ওই আইন প্রত্যাহারের দাবি তুলেছে।

আধা সামরিক বাহিনীর হেফাজতে মনোরমা দেবীর মৃত্যুকে কেন্দ্র করে মণিপুরে সশস্ত্র বাহিনীর বিশেষ ক্ষমতা আইন বাতিলের দাবিতে গত ১৫ দিন ধরে সেখানে বিক্ষোভ আন্দোলন চলছে। নিরাপত্তা বাহিনীর বক্তব্য, মনোরমা দেবী একজন সক্রিয় জঙ্গি কর্মী। তিনি পালাতে গেলে গুলিতে তাঁর মৃত্যু হয়। কিন্তু মণিপুরের একাধিক মহিলা সংগঠন অভিযোগের অঙ্কল তুলছে আধা সামরিক বাহিনীর দিকে। তাদের অভিযোগ, জঙ্গি দমনের নামে সাধারণ মানুষের উপরে যে প্রচণ্ড অত্যাচার চালানো হচ্ছে, মনোরমা দেবীর মৃত্যু তারই একটি নজির। এই মৃত্যুকে কেন্দ্র করে এখন রাজ্যে উপক্রম এলাকা আইন ও সশস্ত্র বাহিনীর বিশেষ ক্ষমতা আইন বাতিলের দাবিতে ছাত্রছাত্রীরা রাস্তায় নেমে বিক্ষোভ আন্দোলন চালাচ্ছে। মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ওকরাম ইবোবি সিংহের নেতৃত্বে কংগ্রেস সরকার, বিরোধী দল সবাই সেখানে বিক্ষোভকারীদের দাবিতে সায় দিচ্ছেন। মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ও স্পিকার এখন দাবি নিয়ে দরবার করতে দিল্লিতে রয়েছেন। এরই মধ্যে কেন্দ্র আজই মণিপুরে নতুন রাজ্যপাল হিসাবে শিবেন্দ্র সিংহ সিধুকে নিয়োগ করেছে।

কিন্তু মণিপুরের অগ্নিগর্ভ পরিস্থিতির মোকাবিলা কী ভাবে করা যায়, তা নিয়ে প্রধানমন্ত্রী আজ দফায় দফায় বিভিন্ন রাজনৈতিক দলের নেতা ও কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভার গুরুত্বপূর্ণ সদস্যদের সঙ্গে কথা বলেছেন। রাতে প্রধানমন্ত্রী সনিয়া গাঁধীর সঙ্গে দেখা করে গোটা পরিস্থিতি নিয়ে বিশদে আলোচনা করেন। তার আগে দিনের বেলায় তিনি কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল, প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায়ের সঙ্গে মণিপুর পরিস্থিতি নিয়ে আলোচনা ও পরামর্শ করেন। একই বিষয়ে প্রণববাবু কথা বলেন জর্জ ফার্নান্ডেজের সঙ্গে। এ ছাড়া, প্রাক্তন উপপ্রধানমন্ত্রী ও বর্তমান বিরোধী দলের নেতা লালকৃষ্ণ আডবাণী এবং সমাজবাদী দলের নেতা অমর সিংহকেও প্রধানমন্ত্রী আলোচনার জন্য ডেকেছিলেন। পরে সি পি এম নেতা হরকিষণ সিংহ সুরজিৎ এবং সিপিআই-এর এ বি বর্ধনের সঙ্গেও তিনি আলাদা করে কথা বলেন। আলোচনায় প্রধানমন্ত্রী জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, মণিপুরে যে হারে সন্ত্রাসবাদী কার্যকলাপ বেড়ে চলেছে, সে কথা মাথায় রেখেই ওই রাজ্য থেকে সশস্ত্র বাহিনীর বিশেষ ক্ষমতা আইন প্রয়োগ থেকে এখন সরে আসা সম্ভব নয়। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর ওই সিদ্ধান্তকে বিজেপি, বামদল সবাই সমর্থন জানিয়েছে। আডবাণী প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে মনে করিয়ে দেন যে এনডিএ সরকারের আমলে নাগাল্যান্ড বিধানসভায় সর্বদলীয় প্রস্তাব গ্রহণ করে উপক্রম এলাকা আইন প্রত্যাহারের দাবি তোলা হয়েছিল, কিন্তু তখনও কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার নাগাল্যান্ডের ওই দাবিকে সমর্থন করেনি। বামপন্থীরা সমর্থন করার সঙ্গেই জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, এটি একটি স্বল্প মেয়াদি ব্যবস্থা মাত্র। একই সঙ্গে দীর্ঘমেয়াদি ব্যবস্থা হিসাবে মণিপুরের আর্থ-সামাজিক বিচ্ছিন্নতা দূর করতে রাজনৈতিক প্রক্রিয়াও শুরু করা দরকার।

এ দিকে, পূর্ব ইফলের পুলিশ সুপার ইবোচা সিংহ জানান, শহরের বাবুরবাজার এলাকায় বিধায়কদের সরকারি আবাসের দিকে বিশাল জনতা ধেয়ে গেলে পুলিশের সঙ্গে সংঘর্ষ বাধে। কাঁদানে গ্যাস ও লাঠিচার্জ করেও তাদের ছত্রভঙ্গ করা যায়নি। বরং জনতার পাথরবৃষ্টিতে ১৮ জন পুলিশ-রায়ফ কর্মী আহত হন। গুলি চলে। বিক্ষোভকারীদের কেউ হতাহত কি না, তা পুলিশ সুপার জানাতে পারেননি।

9-11-80

ATROCITIES IN MANIPUR

12/10/80

THE UNABATED PROTESTS in Manipur over the death in custody of Thangjam Manorama Devi show that the Centre and the State Government need to address the situation with measures that go beyond token gestures. Thirty-two-year-old Manorama was found shot dead a few hours after her arrest by personnel of the Assam Rifles on July 11 on the suspicion that she was an activist of the secessionist People's Liberation Army. Describing Manorama as an "expert in handling explosives," the Assam Rifles has averred that she was shot while trying to escape. But eyewitness accounts of extensive injuries on her body have cast doubts on this story and given rise to the allegation that she was tortured and raped before being killed. The response to the protests has followed a wearily familiar pattern: the State Government institutes a judicial enquiry into the incident; the Union Minister of State for Home, Prakash Jaiswal, flies to Imphal; an Army court of inquiry says it cannot comment on the rape allegation until it receives forensic evidence from the State but finds "some lapses by the Assam Rifles personnel"; and three *havildars* involved in the incident are suspended. But from the extreme steps taken by the protesters — women paraded naked and a man cut off his fingers — the people have clearly lost faith in medicine that treats the symptom, not the cause of the disease.

The Manorama incident is not the first of its kind. Going by the number of atrocities reported, the security forces deployed in the State seem to conduct themselves with total impunity. In this, they are enabled by the Armed Forces (Manipur and Assam) Special Powers Act (AFSPA) of 1958, amended in 1972, and in force in

the whole of Manipur since 1980. This gives the security forces not just extraordinary powers but also uncommon protection. Once an area is declared "disturbed" under the Act, an officer of any rank, including a non-commissioned officer, can enter and search a place without a warrant, destroy it, and carry out an arrest on "reasonable suspicion" that a person has committed or is about to commit a cognisable offence! It allows the killing of a person who in the "opinion" of the officer violates prohibitory orders. But the most shocking aspect of the Act is this: it shuts out avenues of redress by barring all legal proceedings against security forces personnel without the prior sanction of the Central Government. The Act was brought in to deal with the insurgency in the State, but its sweeping provisions have only led to a long list of human rights violations by the security forces, worsening the sense of alienation among the people of the State and fuelling the insurgency.

While upholding the constitutionality of AFSPA in 1997, the Supreme Court directed the security forces "strictly" to observe certain guidelines while exercising the special powers conferred on them by the Act. But evidently, compliance with these guidelines has not been ensured. The protests against the Manorama incident are in reality an explosion of years of bottled-up rage against the actions that are covered up by this Act. It is the responsibility of the Centre to ensure that the situation does not deteriorate any further. Without doubt, the solution to the present problem in Manipur lies in taking a close and honest look at the draconian provisions of the Act and devising a political strategy to deal with the insurgency instead of depending on the armed forces to sort it out.

THE

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The bigger picture

9/15/88
Delhi must decide on Naga demands 2/8

Thankfully, the uncertainty over renewal of the Nagaland ceasefire was over on Friday, with both sides agreeing on an extension for another year following Indian interlocutor K Padmanabiah's talks in Bangkok with NSCN-IM leaders. The dangerous implications of not resolving the issue were all too obvious — the NSCN-IM had alerted its cadres in Nagaland to leave their camps for fear they would be "sitting ducks" once the truce expired on 31 July. The standard norm of announcing its renewal weeks before the expiry of the term ran into trouble following NSCN-IM's opposition to Congress-led UPA's commitment in Common Minimum Programme for territorial integrity of North-eastern states, which put paid to the demand for a single administrative unit or, Greater Nagaland.

Whether or not this sticking point is sorted out is not clear. The joint statement merely says "no new conditions have been imposed or changes made in the agenda or scope of the talks". In other words, there is no radical shift in the Naga stand. It would have been better to stick to unconditional talks — like when dialogue was initiated in 1997. Sensitive Naga integration kept on the boil for too long threatens peace in the region and the Centre must decide forthwith on their demands and evolve a consensus policy.

It is now even more relevant to observe the ceasefire strictly, both in letter and spirit, and grab the advantage. The situation is no better than it was before 1997 save that the guns are silent. Impostors in rebel garb target defenceless civilians and extort money. The state government must do something inspirational to regain the people's trust.

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পিছু হটিয়া 'শান্তি'র পথে?

জঙ্গি নাগাদের সঙ্গে সরকারের সংঘর্ষ-বিরতি চুক্তির মেয়াদ আরও এক বছর সম্প্রসারিত হইয়াছে। ইহাতে সরকার ও বিরোধী, উভয় পক্ষেই স্বস্তির ফুরফুরে সুবাস প্রবাহিত হইতেছে যেন। এমনিতে ফি-বছর এই সংঘর্ষ-বিরতি চুক্তির নবীকরণ একটা নিয়মে পরিণত হইয়াছে। এ ভাবে সাত-সাতটি বছর কাটিয়াও গিয়াছে। নাগা সমস্যার স্থায়ী মীমাংসার পথে নির্দিষ্ট অগ্রগতি কতটা হইয়াছে, তাহা লইয়া প্রশ্ন বা সংশয় থাকিতেই পারে। তবে উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতের প্রধান জনজাতীয় বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদ যে ইহার ফলে প্রশমিত, স্তিমিত রহিয়াছে, তাহাতে সন্দেহ নাই। এ বছর কেন্দ্রে নতুন সরকার ক্ষমতাসীন হওয়ায় নাগা শান্তির প্রক্রিয়া বিড়ম্বিত হইবে, এমন আশঙ্কা মূর্ত হইয়া উঠিয়াছিল। তাহার কারণ, কংগ্রেসের নেতৃত্বাধীন শাসক সংযুক্ত প্রগতিশীল জোট প্রণীত অভিন্ন ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচিতে উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলের রাজ্যগুলির আঞ্চলিক অখণ্ডতা 'অবিকৃত' রাখার অঙ্গীকার ঘোষিত হয়। অমনি মুইভা-ইশাক গোষ্ঠীর জঙ্গি নাগারা শান্তি-বেঠকের টেবিল ছাড়িয়া অরণ্যের আত্মগোপন এবং আত্মরক্ষার ভাষায় ফিরিবার হুমকি দিতে শুরু করেন। তাহাতেই শান্তি-বেঠক বানচাল হওয়ার উপক্রম হয়। শেষ পর্যন্ত অবশ্য তেমন কিছু হয় নাই। কেননা কেন্দ্র অভিন্ন কর্মসূচির শর্ত লইয়া চাপাচাপি করে নাই। স্বস্তি সে কারণেই। সংঘর্ষ ও হিংসা অব্যাহত থাকিলে উন্নয়নের কাজ সুষ্ঠুভাবে হইতে পারে না, আর উন্নয়ন না হইলে জনজাতির অনগ্রসরতাও ঘুচিবার নয়। অতঃপর শেষ বিচারে এই অনগ্রসরতাই তো জনজাতীয় স্বাধিকার ও তৎসংজ্ঞাত বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদের মূলে। তাই উপদ্রুত অঞ্চলে শান্তি ও সুস্থিতি ফিরাইয়া আনা কিংবা বজায় রাখা যে কোনও মূল্যেই জরুরি।

প্রশ্ন একটাই— দেশ এ জন্য ঠিক কতখানি মূল্য দিতে প্রস্তুত? যেমন, নাগাদের সহিত শান্তি ক্রয় করিবার জন্য কেন্দ্র কি অঞ্চলের অন্যান্য জনজাতিকে (যথা, মণিপুরীদের) রুষ্ট করিবার ঝুঁকি লইতে প্রস্তুত? স্মরণ থাকিতে পারে, বছরখানেক আগেই বৃহত্তর নাগাল্যান্ড বা 'নাগালিম'-এর প্রস্তাব ও দাবির মধ্যে মণিপুরের নাগা-অধ্যুষিত জেলাগুলিকে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করার প্রতিবাদে মণিপুর আক্ষরিক অর্থেই অগ্নিগর্ভ হইয়া ওঠে। রাজ্যের বিধানসভা ভবন হইতে শুরু করিয়া বছ

গুরুত্বপূর্ণ সরকারি অট্টালিকা প্রতিবাদী জনরোষের আগুনে ভস্মীভূত হয়। কেন্দ্রে ক্ষমতাসীন সেই সময়কার বিজেপি জোট সরকার সেই প্রবল অসন্তোষের সামনে পশ্চাদপসরণ করিতে বাধ্য হয়। অঞ্চলের অন্যান্য রাজ্যে আন্দোলন অতটা আগ্নেয় না হইলেও অসম ও অরুণাচলের মানুষ 'নাগা সম্প্রসারণবাদ'-এর আগ্রাসী অবস্থানে ক্ষুব্ধ হইয়া ওঠেন। এই প্রেক্ষিতেই বর্তমান শাসক জোট উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলে জনজাতীয় রাজ্যগুলির বর্তমান ভৌগোলিক সীমানা অপরিবর্তিত রাখার সিদ্ধান্ত লয়। দেশান্তরী জঙ্গি নাগা নেতৃত্ব নয়াদিল্লির উপর চাপ সৃষ্টি করিয়া ওই সিদ্ধান্ত রদ করিতে সরকারকে আপাতত বাধ্য করিয়াছে। কিন্তু তাহাতে কি স্থায়ী মীমাংসার পথ সুগম হইবে?

জনজাতীয় স্বাধিকারের বিষয়টি জটিল, বহুমুখী ও বহুমাত্রিক। যেখানে জনজাতীয় গোষ্ঠী ও অ-জনজাতীয়দের দ্বন্দ্ব সমূহ, সেখানে তাহার নিরসনের পদ্ধতি এক রকম। কিন্তু যদি এক জনজাতি অন্য জনজাতির এলাকায় অনুপ্রবেশ করে, বসবাস করে এবং সেই সূত্রে বসবাসের এলাকাটিকে নিজেদের বলিয়া দাবি করে, তবে রাষ্ট্র কী ভাবে, কাহার অনুকূলে হস্তক্ষেপ করিবে? যদি ভূমিপুত্রের সূত্রটি প্রয়োগ করা হয়, তবে কাহার প্রথম বা আদি ভূমিপুত্র, তাহা নির্ণয় করা দরকার। সে ক্ষেত্রে কি ভিত্তিবর্ষ ধার্য করিয়া ভূমিপুত্রের সংজ্ঞা নির্ণয় করা হইবে? অসমে বসবাসকারী বড়ো জনজাতিকে স্বশাসন দিবার সময় অ-বড়ো অভিবাসী বাগিচা-শ্রমিকদের স্বশাসিত পরিষদের বাহিরে রাখার দাবি উঠিয়াছিল। ত্রিপুরায় জনজাতির আজ সংখ্যালঘু, সংরক্ষিত পার্বত্য পরিষদের বাসিন্দা। মেঘালয় ও অরুণাচলে অনেক জনজাতি পরস্পর নিয়ত সংঘাতে লিপ্ত। উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলের জটিল জনবিন্যাসের পুনর্মোঁতায়নে বিষয়ে সুস্পষ্ট ও সংহত নীতি দরকার। যখন যেমন সমস্যা, তখন তেমন মীমাংসা, ইহা কোনও কাজের কথা নয়। মণিপুরি ক্ষোভের বিস্ফোরণে পূর্ববর্তী সরকার পিছু হটিয়াছিল, নাগা নেতাদের সন্ত্রাসে ফিরিবার 'ব্ল্যাকমেল'-এর সামনে বর্তমান সরকার ঘোষিত কর্মসূচি হইতে পিছু হটিয়াছিল। অন্য কোনও জঙ্গি জনজাতীয় গোষ্ঠী গুরুতর সন্ত্রাসের সঙ্কট উঁচাইয়া চাপ দিলে আবার কি সরকার অন্যতর আপসে নিমগ্ন হইবে?

TOO MUCH, TOO LONG

Manipuris Need Army Out, A Window Opened

By JB LAMA

In her book, *South Asia's Fractured Frontier*, Binalakshmi Nepram, of Manipur, writes, "As a child I grew up hearing words like 'combing operations', 'curfew' and 'CRPF'... Like many living in conflict zones, I, too, grew up wrapped in a cycle of gunshots and violence. But the most intriguing thing I realise now was that all these happenings did not appear 'abnormal' to me. I thought those were 'normal' everyday occurrences."

The present has brought no change. Encounters, security force personnel chasing militants and civilians being harassed, even caught in the crossfire and killed, are common occurrences that Manipuris perform take in stride. Nepram's contemporaries apart, a whole generation is growing up in the shadow of the gun and the trauma may well be no different for those they beget. How long this seemingly unending skirmish between the Army and invisible "enemy" will last is anybody's guess but what is becoming increasingly clear is that prolonged use of troops has had little effect so far — on the contrary, it has served to alienate the people.

Abuse of power

It is normal for a state government to seek the Army's help to tackle a difficult law and order situation, but troops are supposed to do the job in a short time and pull out. However, in both Manipur and Nagaland, their presence is more or less permanent.

Looking back over a few years one recalls cases of people being harassed during combing operations, of schoolboys going missing after they are picked up by the Army, of alleged mishandling of women and of jawans running amok and killing civilians to avenge the death of colleagues.

The Disturbed Areas Act, 1955, and the Special Powers Act, 1958, amended in 1972 to the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, were extended to all of Imphal Valley on 8 September 1980. These Acts were already in force in Manipur's Naga-inhabited hill areas and Jiribam subdivision in the west, adjoining Assam. The Manipur administration was at pains to explain that it was forced to resort to extreme measures following the "unprecedented increase in the commission of crimes and killing of innocent people and police and paramilitary personnel, sedition..."

The writer, on The Statesman's staff for more than four decades, specialises on North-east affairs.

Despite strong public protests, particularly from the womenfolk who feared, as in Nagaland, that the Army might commit excesses, there was no respite. The protests were not without basis, because under the laws troops enjoy unbridled authority to enter a house and search and arrest anyone they suspect without a warrant. In the mid-1990s, the Supreme Court curbed the Army's indiscriminate use of the

and totally eliminated Hindi sign posts since July 2000. Successive governments are unable to reverse the order.

The ground realities, though, have changed since 1980, when the state administration had inadequate manpower to deal with insurgents. Over the years the number of Manipur Rifles battalions has multiplied and two units of India Reserve battalions have been created. The



AFSP Act, bringing it under the provisions of the CrPC.

On the face of things, it seems fair to say that given the volatile situation that prevailed then there was not much government could do. Its primary objective was to tackle growing belligerency by the People's Liberation Army — the most potent of the militant outfits headed by N Bisheswar Singh, a vociferous advocate of secession, who trained in Lhasa after failing to obtain a government loan to set up a ceramics unit. But luck ran out when in July 1981, in a surprise attack on a house in Thoubal district, the Army captured him. He later successfully contested the assembly elections from jail, but did not live long. His bullet-ridden body was recovered from a hillock in 1995.

Ground realities

Though the PLA continues to maintain a low profile, it is a force to reckon with. It occasionally advertises a presence by targeting security forces and indulging in reprisals. But it is also engaged in social service like checking the drug menace which has ruined many a Manipuri home. Its political Revolutionary People's Front wing has slapped a ban on the screening of Hindi movies, playing of Hindi songs

civilian duty the better.

The July 11 incident in which the 32-year-old Th Manorama Devi was allegedly abused by Assam Rifles jawans and killed while in their custody has snowballed into a major political crisis. Chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh is under pressure to decide by 15 August on withdrawal of the Acts as nine of his ministers have threatened to quit. The state government reportedly cremated Manorama's body after 16 days following the family's refusal to accept it until the Acts were repealed. The protest by naked women carrying telltale placards in front of Kangla Fort is perhaps not the last. The crusade against the Acts will only gain momentum.

Kangla Charade

The government has not been able to persuade Manipuri housewife Irom Chanu Sharmila to end her fast since 7 November 2000 demanding that the Acts be withdrawn following the killing of 10 civilians the previous day by Assam Rifles. Confined to a hospital bed and watched over by armed guards, government has reportedly spent Rs 2.40 lakhs to keep her alive by nose-feeding.

The Centre often treats Manipur in a lackadaisical manner. Take for example the shifting of the Assam Rifles from Kangla Fort, presently the headquarters of its Manipur Range. Situated in the heart of Imphal town, the Manipuris consider the Fort the "most sacred place". As early as 1976 Manipur government allotted an equivalent plot of land near the long-abandoned World War II-vintage Koirengi airport, eight kilometres from the Fort, where the force was to shift by 1992. Following a relay hunger strike by women and a persistent demand by Manipuris supported by the RPF, a symbolic withdrawal was staged in 1994 in the presence of then Union minister of state for home affairs MM Jacob. But there is still no indication of the Fort being vacated. Having said this, it is also necessary to shift the Assam Rifles firing range from the Chingmeirong residential area, two kilometres from the Fort. Inhabitants often complain of their sleep being disturbed during pre-dawn shooting practice.

The RPF is reported to have suggested that withdrawal of the Acts is a prerequisite for peace. Which makes sense since insurgency is, after all, political and must be tackled accordingly. The Manipuris have for too long lived in suffocating conditions. Somehow, somewhere a window must be opened.

50 injured in violence at Imphal rally

TIMES NEWS NETWORK & AGENCIES

Imphal: At least 50 people were injured in police action in Imphal on Thursday during a massive rally protesting the custodial death of Manorama Devi and demanding immediate withdrawal of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, from the state, official sources said. (Unofficial sources put the injury figure at 100.)

Over 1 lakh people who had gathered at Thangmeiband Thau ground initially proceeded towards Khurai, Lamlong, Telipati and Khuman Lampak—a route charted by the authorities. But as they tried to fan out to all the major roads, the police burst tear-gas shells and sprayed rubber bullets injuring several persons. After hectic negotiations, the rallyists then proceeded on the government-charted route with slogans and placards demanding removal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, asking the army and Central forces to go back and stop torturing civilians.

The rally organisers said they had strongly objected to the route recommended by the authorities and wanted to take out the procession through all major roads. They added that they would continue with their agitation till the Act was completely withdrawn from the state.

Meanwhile, Manipuri women in Guwahati have joined their counterparts in Manipur in demanding the removal of the Act. The womenfolk of Manipuri basti in Guwahati took out torchlight procession on Wednesday night to protest Manorama Devi's killing.

The Manipuri Basti Meira Paibi Women Association of Guwahati has also submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister demanding withdrawal of the Act and punishment to the Assam Rifles personnel responsible for the killing of Manorama Devi.

The memorandum also reminded how a Manipuri girl, Sanjita Devi of Jiribam subdivi-



Demonstrators demanding the removal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act take to their heels as policemen fire teargas shells at Minuthong in Imphal on Thursday

sion, had committed suicide in October last year after army personnel allegedly raped her. "Imagine the mental trauma that forces her to commit suicide," the memorandum read.

On the ongoing agitation in Manipur, the association said the naked protest by twelve Manipuri women at Imphal recently was not only a shocking sight, but also an insult to Indian

democracy as well as the patriotism of army.

The association said the Armed Forces Act was a blank cheque to the army to use any kind of force against the people of Manipur including men, women and even children. They said that if the Act was not removed from Manipur, many more cases similar to Manorama Devi's would occur.

The centre knows that the periphery will have to fall in

Why Manipur burns

ASHOK MITRA

Reading classics broadens the mind. It also offers clues that help to sort out knotty contemporary concerns. The national question fills a large part of the socialist literature spanning from the mid-19th century. The reason is not at all obscure. A nation consists of a group of people who have a government of their own. Should some heterogeneities, such as of language and culture, distinguish the people constituting the nation, these are assumed to be taken care of by the deft hand of the government. The hand, however, can often be far from deft. The people are not unified, they are a baggage of nationalities riven by differences in ethnicity, language and culture, and the regime may fail to bring them together.

This was the problem afflicting the great Habsburg empire, dominated by German-speaking Austrians: German-speaking other fiefdoms had no difficulty in considering themselves as an integral part of the nation-state. The Slavs and the Czechs would not however agree to merge their identity with a nation chock-full of German-speaking groups. They kept resisting. The resistance was a major irritant to the emperor and his flunkies. It posed an almost equal problem for the ideologues dreaming of a magnificent proletarian revolution that would sweep across the whole of Europe. Leaders plotting and planning the revolution had no doubt in their minds: nationalities refusing to sacrifice their identity in the cause of the nation are a nuisance; their divisiveness splits the working class, and thereby, sets back the revolution. Marx had no time to spare for such splitters. Engels was somewhat more ambivalent, and had a word of praise at least for the Czechs valiantly fighting against centuries of German oppression; he was though not supportive of them on overall considerations. Lenin opted for a cautionary approach: yes, sympathy for the lesser nationalities, but they must not allow themselves to be used for sabotaging the revolutionary solidarity of the proletarian masses. Besides, while the Poles, for example, had a strong case for establishing a separate nation-state of their own, would they have enough resources to run the administration of the state on a viable basis? Lenin had his reservations.

Till the November Revolution and the end of the First World War, much of this was academic polemics. The births of Poland and Czechoslovakia apart, circumstances altered in a radical manner for revolutionary ideologues once the Soviet Union emerged as a reality in 1917. There was now no question of not acknowledging the datum of the existence of nationalities such as the Uzbeks, the Turkmen, the Kirgizh and others; their habitations were a bulk of the former Czarist empire and became annexures of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Lenin was incapaci-

tated before he could attempt to tackle satisfactorily the national question: how to reconcile the interests of Russians and these other folk. It landed on the lap of Stalin, who approached the issue with rare imagination. Those firmly of the belief that Stalin was a cruel, insensate, blood-sucking dictator will experience a shock. "In [the Soviet] Union, which as a whole unites not less than 240,000,000 people, of whom about 65,000,000 are non-Russians... it is impossible to govern unless we have with us, here in Moscow, in the supreme organ, emissaries of these nationalities, to express not only the interests common to the proletariat as a whole, but also special, specific

that matter, in the rest of the North-east. The entities in this region were, in the course of the 19th century, gobbled up by the British crown and directly administered, till 1947, by the viceroy of India. They were not, strictly speaking, a part of the Indian empire; the government of India Act 1935 did not apply to them. With the departure of the British, the north-eastern provinces were taken over by the Union of India as if by inheritance. The question of nationalities was not resolved though. States such as Manipur remained in the periphery; the Centre was distant and authoritarian. Each year, Jawaharlal Nehru made quite a ceremony of commending to

afflicting a nationality; riots rage; the Centre then falls back on army-ban-dobast. After many killings, a perfunctory attempt is made to arrange a ceasefire, followed by some sort of a written patch-up. This story has been repeated in Nagaland and Mizoram, and promises to be repeated in Manipur. But in no instance is any intent visible to go into the root of the malady. The Centre, besides, will rob one nationality to placate another, or set one against another, almost on a regular basis: fun and games.

Perhaps the inability lies in the failure to comprehend that the assumption — the Centre always knows best the periphery will have to fall in, or else — will simply not pass muster. And yet, the solution of the centre-periphery issue should have been easier than it was in the European historical instances. The entities in India's North-east, in contrast to those 19th century nationalities who were dispersed all over Europe and flaunted their distinct identities, are territorially homogeneous. With adequate recognition on the Centre's part that they deserve equal respect, regard and attention as other federating states such as Uttar Pradesh or Tamil Nadu do, a happy season could still have unfolded in the North-east.

Instead, just watch what is happening in Manipur. While the Meiteis, concentrated in the three plain districts around Imphal, occupy only 10 per cent of the territory, they constitute 70 per cent of the state's population. Their grievances fall by the wayside because, at this juncture, the Nagas and the Kukis, who hold sway in the strategic hill districts, have to be given more consideration. The plain Manipuris are disaffected. New Delhi tries to sidestep the issue by buying up votes of legislators.

The culture of smothering genuine grievances by bribing legislators or chieftains remains the same whether the party occupying the power centre is the Congress or the Bharatiya Janata Party. Manipur is unquiet, the Centre sends hordes of army and police forces. The situation worsens. More troops descend, incensing the Meiteis further. Unlike in the days of yore, no contingent of women of easy virtue accompanies the troops. The latter therefore pounce upon local women, and the situation becomes a thousand times more explosive.

The Meiteis are in fact a very gentle people, grace spilling from their countenance and bearing. They were won over to the Chaitanya cult of Vaisnavism in the 16th century, which preaches love and humility. Provoked beyond endurance, the Meiteis are now on the warpath, and they are led particularly by the women. The Centre, installed in remote New Delhi, will conceivably continue to behave as woodenly as it has done in the past; it will send more troops



national interest. Without this it will be impossible to govern, comrades": this was Joseph Dzhugashvili writing to the party's central committee at the time the Soviet constitution was being drafted.

It is a different matter whether Stalin's pious wishes were followed to the hilt in the Soviet Union during the tortuous seventy years of its longevity. Perhaps it was, perhaps it was not beyond a certain point of time. But the dictum Stalin scripted stands out for its clarity.

The terms and expressions have got shifted, the debate is no longer in terms of nation and nationalities; these days we talk of the centre and the periphery. The centre is the dominant category, those inhabiting the periphery lead a tremulous existence. They want to migrate towards power and self-determination, but are thwarted. Thereby hangs a tale of dispute, misunderstanding, fulmination, reprisal and counter-reprisal.

Like many other things, the centre-periphery imbroglio is now a global phenomenon. Consider the current state of affairs in Manipur, and, for

Provoked beyond endurance, the Meiteis are now on the warpath, and they are led particularly by the women

New Delhi artistes of different ethnicities from the North-east and have them perform tribal dances on Republic Day evening — a superficial gesture of this nature, smacking of feudal mores, took the periphery further away from the centre.

The nationalities in the north-eastern region have taken their turn to voice their discontent with the existing arrangements: they have many problems, and they want to be heard. The Centre has been cool and indifferent, provoking every now and then armed rebellions. A pattern has emerged over the past five decades in the region: the Centre initially is reluctant to even acknowledge the problems

57-8
28/7

A Garo coup

28/7

Can UPA do ditto with Khasis?

The Congress-led UPA government's peace accord with Garo Hills-based A'chik National Volunteers Council is welcome because of late the outfit's links with Ulfa and Bodo militants pose a major security threat. The pact is for six months and can, change of heart permitting, usher in an era of peace in the Garo Hills. No party in Meghalaya has been able to promote peace. The Congress has a special reason to focus on the Garo Hills as it is the home district of former Lok Sabha Speaker and National Trinamul Congress leader Purno Sangma. In the last parliamentary elections ANVC activists reportedly canvassed for him. At one point, Sangma got into a controversy over his claim that former Prime Minister AB Vajpayee had appointed him to mediate between the Centre and the ANVC, to which DD Lapang's Congress-led coalition objected. The Congress's apparent motive is to regain ground lost in the Garo Hills which since 1977, its stronghold, until Sangma did a somersault on the issue of Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin, which, he thought, would frustrate the ambition to be Prime Minister. ANVC was formed by members of the A'chik Liberation Magtrik Army, who refused to surrender to Meghalaya police in 1994; its main demand is for Greater Garoland.

On the insurgency front, the pact will certainly control infiltration of Ulfa and Bodo militants into Garo Hills which provides an ideal corridor to Bangladesh. Having temporarily "tamed" the ANVC, it will also be in the fitness of things if the UPA thinks of brokering a similar deal with the Khasi-dominated Hinniewtrep National Liberation Council which often shatters the uneasy calm in Shillong by targeting non-tribals.

Enough's enough

9/28/87 Manipur needs Centre, not Army 5/16

The death in Manipur of 32-year-old Th Manorama Devi demands attention. Reportedly apprehended by Assam Rifles' personnel from her home during a search conducted "under specific information", she was allegedly "abused" and killed in custody. The Army version is that this "expert in handling explosives, was involved in blasts resulting in the death of as many as six security personnel", was shot dead while trying to escape. The Army has started an inquiry. The three personnel involved have been "taken off their appointments". The Manipur government's judicial probe is doubtful as in the past the Centre contended that the state administration had no right to order inquiries against the Army, because it is a Central subject. What needs to be probed is whether, while conducting searches, the Army followed the do's and don'ts stipulated by the Supreme Court, like "policewomen must be present while searching women suspects" and that "an arrested person should not be kept under custody for more than 24 hours".

Several innocents were involved in the crossfire and killed. There is no trace of a sportsman and a schoolboy, allegedly picked up by the Army. In the five-month standoff that followed, student activists burnt 33 government offices, several vehicles and forced schools to close for more than a month. Manipur is burning again. Protests by naked Meira Paibis (women torchbearers) is not without significance. A woman was fasting for over three years after 10 people were shot dead. Only Central intervention can remedy the situation. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act has been in force since 1980 but the Army has failed to subdue insurgency. If the situation is no better than it was 24 years ago, this is because the Army cannot function effectively under adverse conditions. Which leaves two options — either withdraw the Act or remove Army posts from civilian areas.

নারী বিক্ষোভে ইফল উত্তাল, লাঠি-গ্যাসে আহত ৮২

প্রভাত ঘোষ • আগরতলা

১৬ জুলাই: মণিপুরের রাজধানী শহর ইফল বিক্ষোভে ফেটে পড়েছে।

আসাম রাইফেলসের হেফাজতে থাকা এক মহিলার মৃত্যুর প্রতিবাদে সারা শহরের বিভিন্ন স্থানে আজ সকাল থেকে বিক্ষোভ মিছিল বের হয়। মহিলাদের সঙ্গে পুলিশ ও নিরাপত্তা বাহিনীর দফায় দফায় সংঘর্ষ হয়। রাত পর্যন্ত গোলমাল চলছে। কয়েকটি মিছিলকে ছত্রভঙ্গ করতে পুলিশকে গুলি-গ্যাস চালাতে হয়। প্রায় ১০০ জন তাতে জখম হন। রাজ্যের মুখ্যসচিব জনান, ৮-২ জনকে হাসপাতালে ভর্তি করা হয়েছে। তারমধ্যে ৬২ জন মহিলা। শহরের জায়গায় জায়গায় নিরাপত্তা বাহিনীর টহলদারি গাড়ি লক্ষ্য করে জলন্ত টায়ার, কাপড়ের পুঁচনি, পটকা ছোড়া হয়েছে।

রাজ্যের অগ্নিগর্ভ পরিস্থিতি দেখে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ওকরাম ইবোবি সিংহ কেন্দ্রের কাছে অবিলম্বে বাড়তি নিরাপত্তা বাহিনী চেয়েছেন। তবে রাজ্যবাসীর ক্রোধ প্রশমিত করতে সেকুলার প্রত্নেসিত ফ্রন্ট সরকার কেন্দ্রের কাছে পাঠানো বাতায় বলছে, কেন্দ্রীয় নিরাপত্তা বাহিনী রাজ্যে এসে যেন মানবাধিকার লঙ্ঘনের ঘটনা না ঘটায়, তা কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারকেই নিশ্চিত করতে হবে।

গতকাল কাংলা দুর্গে আসাম রাইফেলসের আঞ্চলিক সদর দফতরের সামনে মহিলাদের নগ্ন বিক্ষোভের পরেই গোটা রাজ্যে অনির্দিষ্টকালের কার্যু জারি করেছিল রাজ্য সরকার। সেই নিষেধাজ্ঞা যাতে কঠোরভাবে

পালিত হয়, তার জন্য গোটা শহরে পুলিশ ও নিরাপত্তা বাহিনীতে ছেয়ে দেওয়া হয়। তা সত্ত্বেও নিষেধ অমান্য করেই কোংবা, টেরা, সাংগাংফাম, উচেকোন, মন্ত্রিপুকরি, চিয়েমইং-সহ বিভিন্ন এলাকা থেকে বড় বড় মিছিল বের করেন মহিলারা। তাদের পিছনে এসোতে থাকেন পুরুষেরা। তড়িঘড়ি করে আকাবাকা অপটু হস্তাক্ষরে লেখা বড় বড় ব্যানার, পোস্টার নিয়ে কাংলা দুর্গ অভিমুখে এসোতে থাকে মিছিলগুলি।

রাজ্য সশস্ত্র পুলিশ, ইন্ডিয়ান রিজার্ভ-বামিনিসিয়ন, ফিআরপিএফ-এর জওয়ানেরা প্রথমে সাঁজোয়া গাড়ি পথের উত্তর দাঁড় করিয়ে আদেয়াত্র উচিয়ে মিছিলের গতিরোধ করার চেষ্টা করে। তাতে ঝুঁপু হয়ে শেষ অবধি রবারের বৃত্তেট হোড়ে। কাতারে কাতারে মানুষ লুটিয়ে পড়েন রাস্তার উপরে। যাঁরা আহত হননি, তাঁরা এগিয়ে যাওয়ার চেষ্টা করেন। উপায়ান্তর না দেখে অবশেষে পুলিশ লাঠি চালিয়ে মিছিল ছত্রভঙ্গ করে দেয়।

ইফল (পশ্চিম) জেলার পুলিশ সুপার এম ইবোচা সিংহ বিকালে টেলিফোনে বলেন, “মেয়েরা যেন পাগল হয়ে গিয়েছে। এঁদের বিরোধীরা বলছেন, জঙ্গিরা এই বিক্ষোভের পিছনে উস্কানি দিচ্ছে। কিন্তু রকমসকম দেখে আমার তা মনে হচ্ছে না। স্বতশ্চুর্ত না হলে মেয়েরা সাঁজোয়া গাড়িয়ে উঠে পড়ে জওয়ানদের আঁড়ানো কামড়ানোর সাহস পাবে কি করে?”

ক্রোধ এতই বৃদ্ধি পেয়েছে যে, গতকাল কার্যু জারি হওয়ার পরেও তিনটি সরকারি দফতরে আঙুল লাগানো হয়। এ সব দেখে কাল বিকালেই

কর্তাদের নিয়ে বৈঠকে বসেন। সেখানেই স্থির হয় আইনশৃঙ্খলা বজায় রাখার জন্য যা যা করা সরকার, তা করার সঙ্গে বিক্ষোভকারীদের ক্রোধ প্রশমিত করতে প্রচার করা হবে যে, কেন্দ্রের কাছে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী নিরাপত্তা বাহিনীর বাড়াবাড়ি নিয়ে অভিযোগ করেছেন।

আজ মুখ্যমন্ত্রী টেলিফোনে বলেন, “আমাদের প্রথম কাজ মানুষের মনে আস্থা ফিরিয়ে আনা। তার জন্য আমি কালই কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিলকে বলেছি মানুষকে নিরাপত্তা দেওয়ার নাম করে কেন্দ্রীয় বাহিনী রাজ্যে এসে মাঝে মাঝেই মানবাধিকার লঙ্ঘনের ঘটনা ঘটায়। কেন্দ্রকেই এর দায়িত্ব নিতে হবে। এর আগেও আমি বিধানসভাতেও স্বীকার করেছি, এ রাজ্যে কেন্দ্রীয় নিরাপত্তা বাহিনী অনেকগুলি ভূয়ো সংঘর্ষের খবর প্রচার করেছিল। তাতে প্রায় ২০-২২ জন যুবককে হত্যা করা হয়েছে। এ সব চলতে পারে না।” মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর এদিনের বক্তব্যে স্পষ্টই হয়ে গিয়েছে, মনোরমা নামে খুন হওয়া মহিলার নামে যে-কথা আসাম রাইফেলস এতদিন ধরে বলে আসছে, তা রাজ্য সরকারও বিশ্বাস করে না। যদিও মেয়েটির অস্বাভাবিক মৃত্যুর তদন্ত করতে রাজ্য সরকার ইতিমধ্যেই একটি বিচারবিভাগীয় কমিটি গঠন করেছে।

তবে রাজ্যের বিরোধী দল বিজেপি-র বিধায়ক দলের নেতা ও প্রাক্তন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী রাজকুমার দোরেন্ড্র সিংহ বলেন, “আসলে মানুষের ব্যাপক ক্ষোভকে চাপা দিতেই সরকার বিচারবিভাগীয় তদন্ত কমিটি গড়েছে। এই

Y. N. B. S. S. S. S. S.

Manipur erupts after stark protest

Women bear brunt of rubber bullets

Press Trust of India
Imphal, July 16

OVER 40 people, mostly women, were injured today when cops fired teargas shells and rubber bullets to disperse demonstrators who tried to take out a rally protesting against the rape and murder of Thangjam Manoram defying an indefinite curfew in Imphal.

According to official reports, thousands of protesters from several parts of the state assembled in Imphal town and attempted to break security barricades at Kongba, Khurai, Chingmeirong, Tera, Keisampat and other entry points.

As the irate mobs refused to budge from the entry points, the police fired teargas shells and rubber bullets injuring many. Sources said two women were critically wounded in the Chingmeirong area and four others in Kongba. A woman home guard was injured when a mob threw stones at security personnel in the Kongba area, while some others were wounded by rubber bullets in Tera.

Official sources said reinforcements had rushed to the trouble zones to thwart protest marches. Reports from the districts said about 3,000 people took out a procession in Thoubal and later submitted a memorandum to the deputy commissioner of police and Assam Rifles authorities against the killing of Manorama. Protests also continued at Moirang in Bishenpur district.

Police posts in curfew-bound areas of Greater Imphal have been put on maximum alert to prevent violations. Reports said despite a downpour, irate mobs were still trying to break down security barricades in curfew-bound areas. Stoning, burning of tyres, road blockades to prevent movement of security vehicles were reported from various parts of Imphal.

Sources said the injured have been rushed to the J.N. Hospital and Regional Institute of Medical Science Hospital for treatment.



Women in Manipur protest on Thursday against the alleged rape and murder of a woman by Assam Rifles jawans.

Govt bans cable news

THE OKRAM Ibobi Singh government in Manipur banned news broadcast on local cable network channels for some time on Thursday after they aired naked women protesting in front of the Assam Rifles range office in Imphal against the alleged rape and killing of Thangjam Manorama.

About 30 women from different major social organisations stripped and shouted slogans — 'rape us, kill us, take our flesh' — accusing Assam Rifles personnel of sexually assaulting and killing the 32-year-old woman on July 10. The security forces had claimed that she had links with a banned insurgent outfit and had carried out several operations against the Army.

Meanwhile, the All-Manipur Working Journalists' Union has appealed to the government not to disrupt the broadcast of news or functioning of the Press.

PTI, Imphal

Army shies off naked truth

command, how can we comment on any incident?" he said, adding that they have confirmed reports that Thangjam Manorama was a "most-wanted guerrilla" and was involved in a series of operations against security forces.

Quoting the factsheets and dossier of Manorama available at the Assam Rifles headquarters in Shillong, the officer claimed that she had joined the PLA in 1995 and was trained under the 101 Mobile Battalion.

"Working as a corporal in the PLA, Thangjam Manorama was very close to self-styled second-lieutenant Shyam,

ments were found in her possession, but her arrest memo did not mention anything about the seizure and had said she had been detained on suspicion of having links with insurgents.

Director-general of the Assam Rifles Lt-Gen. Bhopinder Singh was not available for comments despite efforts. Major K.R. Rajkumar, the public relations officer at the headquarters here, told *Hindustan Times* that they had nothing to comment on the issue as the 17th Battalion was under the operational command of the 3rd Corps of the Army.

"When the battalion is not under our

the IED expert of the outfit. She was the commander of the Women Action Council of the group," Rajkumar said. "Manorama, who was about to be promoted to the rank of sergeant, had carried out a series of IED blasts, mostly against security forces, in the Imphal Valley."

Moreover, he added, she was also involved in recruitment of women cadres in PLA and had been passing on intelligence inputs to the outfit's general headquarters in Khangtol.

Meanwhile, officials at the headquarters of the Army's 3rd Corps in Rangapahar (near Dimapur in Nagaland) said an inquiry has been instituted to dig out the truth. They added that general-officer-commanding (GOC) Lt-Gen. Daljit Singh rushed to Kangla Fort to take stock of the situation.

Anirban Roy
Shillong, July 16

EVEN AFTER dozens of Manipuri women stripped and stormed the Assam Rifles range office at Kangla Fort yesterday, the 169-year-old elite paramilitary force is yet to come out with any official statement on the alleged rape and killing of 32-year-old Thangjam Manorama on July 10.

Troops of the 17th battalion of Assam Rifles, who picked up Manorama from her house in the wee hours of Sunday alleging that she was a corporal of the banned PLA, later claimed she was shot while trying to flee from custody. Interestingly, the Assam Rifles had also claimed that a wireless set, a grenade and some incriminating docu-

'Rape us, take our flesh'

Statesman News Service

IMPHAL, July 15. — Indefinite curfew has been imposed in both the twin capital districts of Imphal East and Imphal West since 11 a.m. today after a group of naked women, calling themselves *meira paibis* (torch bearer), stormed the western gate of Kangla Fort.

The *meira paibis*, incensed over the alleged molestation and shooting of 32-year-old Th Manoram after she was picked up by troops of 17th Assam Rifles, stripped themselves in front of the gate and shouted slogans for nearly 20 minutes before police came.

The woman activists — bearing festoons that read "Indian Army rape us" and "Indian Army take our flesh" — banged the iron gates of the fort, that houses the headquarters of the 17th Assam Rifles.

An Assam Rifles officer came out with folded hands to calm the women but to no avail. At least four women were later hospitalised after they fainted.

Though the government has ordered a judicial inquiry and the Assam Rifles authorities have ordered an independent inquiry, women activists are not satisfied and have demanded withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Powers



Naked protesters at Kangla Fort on Thursday. — EP

Act. Manorama (32) was arrested from her home in Imphal East in the wee hours of 11 July by 17th Assam Rifles jawans.

She was found shot dead a few hours later, allegedly while trying to escape. Assam Rifles later claimed to have recovered from her a hand grenade, radio set and documents, contradictory to the arrest memo, which had recorded a nil recovery.

Protests, bandh over killing

IMPHAL, July 15. — Protesters burnt effigies of the Manipur chief minister, Mr O Ibobi Singh, in at least two places on the first day of the two-day statewide general strike called by several social organisations against the killing of Th Manorama. Roads, particularly in the Imphal East area, were blocked at several places by strike supporters. Tyres were burnt and roads dug up by protesters along the Imphal-Yairipok Road in the district. The capital city wore a deserted look with shops closed and vehicles staying off roads. School, colleges and government offices also remained closed. Protesters held *dharna* at several places demanding the resignation of Mr Ibobi Singh for failing to restrain armed forces from killing people after arresting them. — SNS

MONDAY, JULY 12, 2004

POLITICS OF OPPORTUNISM

10
12/7

THE STRANGE AND unusual goings on in Arunachal Pradesh have focussed attention on diverse issues, political and legal. At one level, there is the barefaced manner in which a group of ruling party Members of the Legislative Assembly crossed over to the Opposition camp after being dropped from the State Cabinet — a reflection of the continuing political opportunism in the State. At another level, there is the role played by the Governor, V. C. Pande, who, after dissolving the State Assembly, recommended that Arunachal Pradesh be placed under President's Rule, only to withdraw this recommendation a little later. The circumstances that led to this unprecedented withdrawal are disputed and far from clear. But it has evidently placed the Centre in something of a quandary. The cautious manner in which the Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, has reacted suggests that the Centre wants time to examine the facts that precipitated the crisis and also study the legal ramifications of any decision it takes. At the same time, Mr. Patil has suggested that the option of imposing President's Rule in Arunachal Pradesh has not been ruled out. However, with the dissolution of the Assembly already notified, it is difficult to see how a legal case can be made out for bringing a State under President's Rule.

The political turmoil in Arunachal Pradesh has its origins in the decision of Chief Minister Gengong Apang to downsize his BJP-led United Democratic Front Ministry from 41 to 12, in order to meet the provisions laid down by the 97th Constitution Amendment. Soon after the downsizing exercise was over, Mr. Apang's Cabinet recommended that the State Assembly be dissolved — a move evidently prompted by the realisation that those dropped in the pruning exercise as well as some others were likely to join hands with the Congress and bring his Government down. The Governor dissolved the House,

a decision that sparked off criticism that he had done so on the advice of a Chief Minister who had already lost his majority. However, this controversy was relegated to a footnote in the chapter that followed, that is after Mr. Pande first recommended action under Article 356(1) on the ground that there was a constitutional breakdown in the State and then, within the space of a few hours, asked the Centre to ignore his recommendation. The Governor has claimed that he signed the first report under duress, after a group of MLAs and their followers "stormed" into his chamber and gheraoed him "for more than five hours." This group, led by the Congress leader and former State Chief Minister Mukut Mithi, has strongly denied putting any undue pressure on Mr. Pande.

In the backdrop of this soap opera is the Assembly election, which is scheduled for September. The Mithi group wants President's Rule principally because it is strongly opposed to Mr. Apang being caretaker Chief Minister in the run-up to the polls; it asserts that elections will not be free and fair in such a situation. Over the last few years, Mr. Mithi and Mr. Apang have been engaged in undoing each other, their political tussle assuming a markedly personal edge. It was only last year that Mr. Mithi's Government was reduced to a minority when a majority of Congress MLAs (including 17 Ministers) quit the party, formed a separate legislative group, and eventually constituted the UDF Government with Mr. Apang at the head of it. Mr. Apang, who orchestrated the split, was himself forced to step down as Chief Minister in 1999 after Mr. Mithi lured away enough dissidents to stake a claim to form the Government. Arunachal's recent politics has revolved around the moves of these two heavyweights, who know only too well the erratic, fickle and self-serving nature of many of those elected to the legislature.

Recall Arunachal Governor: Mithi

By Our Special Correspondent

GUWAHATI, JULY 10. The former Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister, Mukut Mithi, today demanded that the Centre recall the Governor, V.C. Pande, and impose President's rule in the State.

Addressing a press conference here this afternoon, Mr. Mithi said a memorandum signed by 36 MLAs would be submitted to the President tomorrow to press their demands.

The Congress would launch a series of agitation programmes, including bandhs, beginning on Monday to press their demands.

The Governor, who dissolved the State Assembly on July 6, had recommended imposition of President's rule in the State the next day when Congress legislators and breakaway members of the BJP called on him at the Raj Bhavan.

The legislators demanded that either the dissolution of the House be reviewed or President's rule be recommended to ensure a free and fair election in the State.

The Assembly elections are scheduled for October.

The Governor, however, on July 7 wrote a second letter to



The former Arunachal Chief Minister and leader of the Opposition, Mukut Mithi, talking to the media in Guwahati on Saturday. — Photo: Ritu Raj Konwar

the President informing him that he had recommended President's rule in the State "under duress."

Mr. Mithi refuted the Governor's allegation and also showed video clippings of the legislators at the Raj Bhavan

when they submitted their views opposing the dissolution of the House.

The former Chief Minister said that imposition of President's rule was necessary as the ensuing Assembly elections would not be free and fair with Mr. Gegong Apang heading a caretaker Government.

Mr. Mithi also claimed that the Governor himself had directed one of his staff to prepare a draft of the recommendation of President's rule.

The Governor, however, alleged that a prepared draft was placed before him by the legislators.

The political drama in the State began on July 6 after the new Cabinet of Mr. Apang met hurriedly within few hours of the downsizing and recommended dissolution of the House to the Governor.

Mr. Mithi also said that the Congress would welcome the return of all those legislators who had deserted the party but not Mr. Apang.

He claimed that Mr. Apang made efforts to return to the Congress and he had suggested to the All-India Congress Committee that he should not be accepted.

‘পাগল’ রাজ্যপালকে সরাতে ৪৮ ঘণ্টা সময় দিলেন মুকুট মিথি

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, গুয়াহাটি ও নয়াদিল্লি, ১০ জুলাই— অরুণাচল প্রদেশের রাজ্যপালকে ‘পাগল’ বলে অভিহিত করে তাঁকে অপসারণ ও অবিলম্বে সেখানে রাষ্ট্রপতি শাসন জারি করার জন্য ৪৮ ঘণ্টা সময় দিল অরুণাচল কংগ্রেস। এই দাবি নিয়ে প্রধানমন্ত্রী ও কংগ্রেস সভানেত্রীর সঙ্গে সবিস্তার কথা বলতে রাজ্যের প্রাক্তন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী মুকুট মিথি চার প্রতিনিধিকে নিয়ে আজ নয়াদিল্লি এসেছেন। অন্য দিকে, এই দুটি দাবি মেনে নিয়ে কেন্দ্র যেন ‘ক্ষমতার অপব্যবহার’ না করে, সেই হুঁশিয়ারি দিয়েছেন বি জে পি সভাপতি বেঙ্কাইয়া নায়াডু। অরুণাচল প্রদেশে অবিলম্বে ভোট নেওয়ার ব্যবস্থা করতে নির্বাচন কমিশনের কাছেও আবেদন জানিয়েছেন তিনি।

স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রক সূত্রে অবশ্য খবর, এই ডামাডোলের জেরে রাজ্যপাল পদ খোয়াতে পারেন বিনোদ পাণ্ডে। কারণ, সরকারের শীর্ষ নেতৃত্বের একটি বড় অংশ মনে করছে, বর্তমান সংকটে রাজ্যপাল তাঁর ভূমিকা ঠিক মতো পালন করেননি। গত ৭ জুলাই তিনি অরুণাচলে রাষ্ট্রপতি শাসন জারি করার সুপারিশ করে কালামের কাছে চিঠি পাঠিয়েছিলেন। কিন্তু তার পরের দিনই তিনি আর একটি চিঠি লিখে রাষ্ট্রপতিকে বলেন, আইন শৃঙ্খলা পরিস্থিতি এখন ঠিক আছে। ফলে তাঁর আগের সুপারিশ যেন উপেক্ষা করা হয়। সুপারিশ প্রত্যাহার করার আর্জি জানিয়ে রাজ্যপাল রাষ্ট্রপতিকে বলেন, বিশেষ পরিস্থিতিতে তিনি সেটা পেশ করতে বাধ্য হয়েছিলেন। এ নিয়ে লোকসভাতেও হইচই হয়। অধিবেশনে বিবৃতি দেন প্রাক্তন উপ প্রধানমন্ত্রী লালকৃষ্ণ আডবানী।

কৌশল ঠিক করতে বেঙ্কাইয়া আজ গুয়াহাটিতে অরুণাচল প্রদেশের কিছু শীর্ষ নেতার সঙ্গে বৈঠকে বসেন। সাংবাদিকদের বলেন, সংবিধানের ১৭৪ ধারা প্রয়োগ করে এক বার রাজ্যপাল ওই রাজ্যের বিধানসভা বাতিল করেছেন। একই সঙ্গে সংবিধানের ৩৫৬ ধারা প্রয়োগ করে রাষ্ট্রপতির শাসন জারি করা যায় না। নানা সময়ে কংগ্রেস গায়ের জোরে বিভিন্ন রাজ্যে ৩৫৬ ধারা প্রয়োগ করেছে। এই কাজে ওরা খুব দক্ষ। অরুণাচলে কংগ্রেস যেন সেই চেষ্টা না করে। কংগ্রেস উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতের রাজ্যগুলিকে রাজনৈতিক ভাবে অস্থির করার চেষ্টা করছে।

অন্য দিকে, আজ মিথি দিল্লি যাওয়ার পথে গুয়াহাটিতে সাংবাদিকদের বলেন, “রাজ্যপাল পুরোপুরি অপ্রকৃতিস্থ। ওঁর মস্তিষ্কের ঠিক নেই। কী বললেন, একটু পরেই ভুলে যান। পরিচয় থাকে সত্ত্বেও আমাকেই বলছেন, মুকুট মিথির সঙ্গে কথা বলব। কোথায় গেলেন উনি। বিহার থেকে যখন ওঁকে অরুণাচল প্রদেশে পাঠানো হল, তখনই তিনি অসুস্থ ছিলেন। রাজ্যের কংগ্রেস সরকারকে ফেলে দেওয়ার ব্যাপারে তাঁকে দায়িত্ব দেওয়া হয়েছিল। এই পরিস্থিতিতে তাঁকে রাজ্যপাল হিসাবে রাখলে কেবল রাজ্যের নয়, দেশের পক্ষে তা লজ্জাকর হবে।”

মিথি বলেন, বুধবার আমরা যখন বিধায়কের সংখ্যার হিসেব নিয়ে রাজ্যপালের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করি, পুলিশ ও প্রশাসনের দুই পদস্থ অফিসার ওখানে ছিলেন। সবার সামনেই রাজ্যপাল রাষ্ট্রপতির শাসন জারি করার সুপারিশ পাঠালেন নয়াদিল্লিতে। এর পর কী ভাবে রাজ্যপাল মত বদল করে অভিযোগ করছেন, চাপে পড়ে বাধ্য হয়ে এই সুপারিশ করতে হয়েছে? এই প্রশ্নে বেঙ্কাইয়া বলেন, “দাবি মানার জন্য কংগ্রেস সমর্থকেরা পাঁচ ঘণ্টা ধরে রাজ্যপালের উপর চাপ সৃষ্টি ও অশ্লীল ভাষা প্রয়োগ করেছেন। রাজ্যপাল সেই রিপোর্টও নয়াদিল্লিতে পাঠিয়েছেন। তাঁর পাঠানো রিপোর্ট আমরা বিশ্বাস করি।” বেঙ্কাইয়ার যুক্তি খারিজ করে মিথি ভি সি আর-এ সাংবাদিকদের রাজ্যপালের সঙ্গে কংগ্রেস প্রতিনিধিদের আলোচনার রেকর্ডিং দেখান। প্রশ্ন করেন, আপনাবরাই বলুন কার কথা ঠিক। আন্দোলনের অঙ্গ হিসাবে সোমবার থেকে ধর্না, রাজভবন অভিমুখে মিছিল করবে অরুণাচলের কংগ্রেস। মঙ্গলবার কংগ্রেস রাজধানী ইটানগরে ১২ ঘণ্টার বন্ধের ডাক দিয়েছে। এর মধ্যে দাবি পূরণ না হলে রাজ্যব্যাপী ৪৮ ঘণ্টা লাগাতার বন্ধের ডাক দেওয়া হবে।

মিথি সরকারকে ফেলে গত ২ অগস্ট অরুণাচল প্রদেশে ক্ষমতাসীন হয় আপাং মন্ত্রিসভা। এই রাজনৈতিক পাল্লাবদলের নেপথ্যে বি জে পি এবং আইজাক-মুইভাপহী ন্যাশনাল সোস্যালিস্ট কাউন্সিল অব নাগালিমের (এন এস সি এন-আই এম) হাত ছিল বলে বিভিন্ন মহলে অভিযোগ ওঠে। রাজনৈতিক মহলের খবর, এবারেও পাল্লাবদলে এন এস সি এন সক্রিয় হয়েছে। এই সম্পর্কে প্রশ্ন করলে মিথি বলেন, “এ নিয়ে আমি কিছু বলতে চাইনা। কেবল এন এস সি এন-কে অনুরোধ করব সন্ত্রাসবাদ ছেড়ে মূল স্রোতে ফিরে আসতে।” রাষ্ট্রপতির শাসনের মধ্যে রাজ্যে ভোট হলে কংগ্রেসের পক্ষে সুবিধাজনক হবে, এই যুক্তি দলের শীর্ষ নেতৃত্বকে গত কয়েকদিন ধরে বোঝাচ্ছেন মিথি। অন্যদিকে, মিথিকে সরানোর জন্যও কংগ্রেস শীর্ষ নেতৃত্বের উপরে চাপ সৃষ্টি করতে গত এক সপ্তাহ ধরে দিল্লিতে শিবির বানিয়েছেন রাজ্য কংগ্রেসের সহ-সভাপতি নাবাম কুকি। তাঁর পাণ্টা প্রস্তাব, মিথিকে সরিয়ে দেওয়া হোক। তাহলে গোগং আপাং ও তাঁর সহযোগীরা ফের কংগ্রেসে ফিরে আসবেন। আপাংও ইতিমধ্যেই এই শর্তের কথা জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন।

11 JUL 2004

'Ignore President's rule plea'

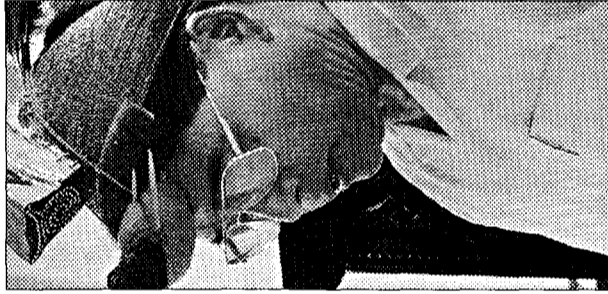
Arunachal Governor says he acted under duress

Rahul Karmakar & PTI
Guwahati, July 8

ARUNACHAL PRADESH Governor V.C. Pande has added a twist to the state's political drama by seeking withdrawal of his recommendation to impose President's rule on the state. He has requested the President to "ignore the earlier report purported to have been sent under my signature".

Pande has written a second letter to President APJ Abdul Kalam, saying: "I regret to say that the signature in the said report was obtained under duress. Not only myself, but also all my staff were put under tremendous mental and physical pressure by all former MLAs and their political workers who stormed into my chamber and remained there, gheraoing me for more than five hours." Copies of the letter were released to the press in Itanagar last night.

Though Pande stopped short of naming any party, Chief Minister Gegong Apang accused the Mukut Mithi-led Congress of forcing the Governor into recom-



API Abdul Kalam & Gegong Apang

mending President's rule by "getting physical".

The bullying, he said, was to prevent Apang from carrying on as a caretaker chief minister as Pande had initially wanted.

The dissolution of the ministry was necessitated after Apang downsized his ministry from 33 to 12 on Tuesday night, after which the dropped ministers switched loyalty to the Congress. Saying he literally signed a readymade recommendation, Pande alleged that "all ex-MLAs and their political workers" had stormed into his chamber and gheraoed him for more than five hours.

They urged him to reconsider his decision

Downsizing revolt hits Lapang

A REBELLION is fast gathering strength against Meghalaya Chief Minister D.D. Lapang after some ministers were dropped because of the Centre's downsizing exercise.

The anger gained momentum after some of the dropped ministers were selected as parliamentary secretaries. After reaching Shillong from Delhi tomorrow, Lapang will reportedly administer oath of office to at least five dropped ministers. Lapang decided to appoint them as parliamentary secretaries to pacify them. But Lapang's dropped colleagues are unhappy with the 'selection criterion'. Prominent among them is former home minister R. G. Lyngdoh, believed to be Lapang's trusted lieutenant who too was axed in the pruning exercise. Apparently 'refusing' to accept a parliamentary secretary's post, he sought to know why the position was dropped when the 'improved' law and order situation was being cited as an 'achievement' of the MDA government.

PTI, Shillong

dissolution of the state assembly, Congress leaders along with 10-11 erstwhile BJP ministers wanted to meet the governor to protest against his recommendation. He also said there was no question of 'gheraoing' the Governor. Moreover, an SP and DIG in plain dress were present during the meeting, he said.

9 BJP MLAs join Cong

Amid the trading of charges, nine of the 21 dissident BJP leaders who were dropped from the Apang ministry joined the Congress on Thursday. Among them were influential leaders like Lijum Roniya and Tamiyo Taga.

Congress leaders in Itanagar say the number of BJP dissidents in the Congress would rise to "at least 18 by Friday". The strength of the Congress in the dissolved 60-member House would then rise to 34.

In Delhi, the leader of the opposition L.K. Advani today demanded a statement from the government on this issue.

"I am demanding that the government make a statement on the Constitutional position in Arunachal. It is a very serious issue. The Governor has said he was under duress from 23 MLAs to recommend President's rule," Advani said. The Centre says President's rule will not be imposed yet.

বৈঠকের জন্য নয় শর্ত দিল নাগা জঙ্গিরা

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, গুয়াহাটি, ২ জুলাই:
ফের বেঁকে বসেছেন নাগা জঙ্গিরা। শর্ত
দিয়েছেন, কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের অভিন্ন
ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচি থেকে একটি বিষয় বাদ না
দিলে তাঁরা আর শান্তি আলোচনা চালাবেন
না।

অভিন্ন ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচিতে বলা হয়েছে,
উত্তর-পূর্বের রাজ্যগুলির রাষ্ট্রীয় কাঠামো
অক্ষুণ্ণ রাখা হবে। অর্থাৎ উত্তর-পূর্বের
রাজ্যগুলির সীমানা আর পুনর্বিন্যাস করা
হবে না। এই ব্যাপারেই আপত্তি নাগা
জঙ্গিদের। কারণ, ওই বিষয়টি রেখে
আলোচনা চালালে তাঁদের 'নাগালিম' বা
বৃহত্তর নাগাল্যান্ড গঠনের দাবি আদায় করা
সম্ভব হবে না। তাই অভিন্ন ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচি
থেকে ওই বিষয়টি বাদ না-দিলে আলোচনা
থেকে সরে দাঁড়াবার ছমকি দিয়েছে
ন্যাশনাল সোস্যালিস্ট কাউন্সিল অব
নাগাল্যান্ড তথা এনএসসিএন (আইএম)।

সাত বছর আগে এনএসসিএন
(আইএম) কেন্দ্রের সঙ্গে অস্ত্র সংবরণ চুক্তি
করে। এই চুক্তির মেয়াদ ৩১ জুলাই শেষ
হওয়ার কথা। সেই মেয়াদ এক বছর
বাড়ানো হচ্ছে। কেন্দ্রের ইউপিএ সরকার
ক্ষমতাসীন হওয়ার পরে আর্মিস্টারডামে
কয়েক দিন আগে দু'পক্ষের মধ্যে প্রথম
বৈঠক হয়। সেখানে নাগা প্রতিনিধিরা
ভারতের দুই প্রতিনিধি ইনটেলিজেন্স
ব্রাঞ্চার অধিকর্তা কে পি সিংহ এবং প্রাক্তন
পররাষ্ট্র সচিব কে পদ্মনাভাইয়াকে জানিয়ে
দেন, অভিন্ন ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচিতে
পূর্বোত্তরের কাঠামো অক্ষুণ্ণ রাখার যে
আশ্বাস দেওয়া হয়েছে, তা প্রত্যাহার না-
করলে শান্তি বৈঠকে ভবিষ্যতে অংশ
নেওয়া যাবে না।

এএসসিএন (আইএম)-এর দাবি,
অসম-মণিপুর-অরুণাচল প্রদেশের সীমানা-
সংলগ্ন নাগা অধ্যুষিত এলাকাকুলিকে নিয়ে

'নাগালিম' গঠন। এর বিরোধিতা করে
প্রতিবেশী তিন রাজ্যের মানুষ ও সরকার
আপত্তি জানিয়েছে। এই পরিস্থিতিতে
অভিন্ন ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচির ব্যাপারে
এনএসসি এন-এর ছমকি এবং অসম-
নাগাল্যান্ডের সীমানার বিতর্কিত অঞ্চলে
'আদর্শ গ্রাম' তৈরির চেষ্টায় ওই গোষ্ঠীর
ইচ্ছনের অভিযোগকে ঘিরে সঙ্কট দেখা
দিয়েছে।

এ দিকে, নাগাল্যান্ডের প্রাক্তন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী
তথা প্রবীণ নেতা সানিয়াংবা ছুবাতোশি
জামিরকে প্রদেশ কংগ্রেস সভাপতি পদ
থেকে সরিয়ে নেওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে
কেন্দ্র। জামিরের দৃষ্টিভঙ্গির ব্যাপারে দীর্ঘ
দিন ধরে প্রতিবাদ জানাচ্ছিল এনএসসিএন
(আইএম)। তিন বার তাঁকে খুন করার
চক্রান্ত হয়। তিন বারই অস্ত্রের জন্য রক্ষা
পান জামির। প্রদেশ কংগ্রেস সভাপতি ৭৪
বছরের জামির এক সময়ে জওহরলাল
নেহরুর সংসদীয় সচিবের দায়িত্ব পালন
করেছিলেন।

রাজনৈতিক মহলের খবর, জামিরকে
রাজ্যপাল করা হবে। এই প্রসঙ্গে জামির
বলেন, "কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল
রাজ্যপালের দায়িত্ব দিতে চেয়েছেন। আমি
তাঁকে বলেছি কোনও শান্ত রাজ্যে যেতে
চাই। যেখানে বুলেটপ্রুফ জ্যাকেট নেই।
একে-৪৭ নেই। এনএসসিএন-এর সঙ্গে
শান্তি প্রক্রিয়ার ব্যাপারে জামিরের
নেতৃত্বাধীন কংগ্রেস বার বার আপত্তি
জানিয়েছে। এনএসসিএন-এর বক্তব্য,
"জামির হলেন ভারতীয় জাতীয়তাবাদী ও
শান্তি আলোচনার প্রধান বাধা।" খবর,
অন্য রাজ্যের দায়িত্ব দিয়ে নাগাল্যান্ড থেকে
জামিরকে সরিয়ে দেওয়া গেলে তাঁর
কোনও মন্তব্য করার এজিয়ার থাকবে না।
এতে এনএসসিএন-ও খুশি হবে বলেই
কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার ওই সিদ্ধান্ত নিচ্ছে।

3 JUL 2004

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

Two shot in Assam bid to evict Nagas

SNS and PTI

GUWAHATI, July 1. — A magistrate and a cop were killed and ten people injured in a gun battle between police and Naga settlers in a dense forest of Assam's Karbi Anglong district bordering Nagaland.

The standoff broke out when the Assam police went to the Dhansiri Reserve Forest Area to evict encroachers from Nagaland, police sources said. The police personnel from Karbi Anglong reached the forest this afternoon and at first tried to persuade some Nagas from neigh-

bouring Nagaland, who had settled there, to desist from constructing houses and a church there, they said.

The Nagas turned hostile and attacked the police triggering the gun-battle, according to the sources.

The bodies of the executive magistrate Deepankar Das and a constable could not yet be brought from the remote area while the 10 injured people were taken to hospital, the sources said adding the involvement of NSCN (IM) cannot be ruled out in the attack on the security forces.

The chief secretaries and DGPs of the two neighbouring states held tele-

phonic talks on the situation which remained tense and the Army was asked to stand by, an official spokesman said.

Police sources in Karbi Anglong informed that district superintendent of police, Mr Pankaj Sharma, led the team of police personnel to carry out the eviction. Assam home secretary Mr Badal Mazumdar told The Statesman that an eviction operation was being carried out inside Dhansiri Reserve Forest by the state border areas development department with the help of the district administration in Karbi Anglong. Over 500 personnel

of the Assam Police and CRPF jawans started from their district headquarters in Diphu early this morning to carry out the operation.

A group of over 40 Naga families last month strayed into Assam territory and were trying to set up a village over a huge spread of land inside the forest under the name of Aturkimi Tribal Model Village in the Karbi Anglong district.

The Nagas initially claimed they had been allotted land by an NGO under the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council and produced documents supporting their claim.

On inquiry by the administration, the documents produced by them were found to be fake.

The KAAC too has confirmed that it had not allotted any land to any NGO and said there was conspiracy behind the episode.

Meanwhile, panic has gripped the Dimasa tribal people living in the area since 1871. The Karbi Anglong unit of All Dimasa Students Union has alleged that the Naga rebel outfit, NSCN-IM, had encouraged encroachment of forest land inside the Assam territory to "further its goal of a greater Nagaland."

2 JUL 2001

THE STATESMAN

PRIORITISE PEACE

Delhi Must Take A Fresh Look At Naga Truce

By JB LAMA

The change of guard at the Centre has put a question mark on the Naga peace talks. The Congress-led United People's Alliance decision to break the 18-month lull is a positive sign, but there are too many imponderables to overcome before tackling the brass-tacks. NSCN-IM leaders are already fuming over the UPA's incorporating a commitment in its Common Minimum Programme that it will, while tackling insurgency, preserve the territorial integrity of North-east states. This is understandable because it puts paid to the demand for a single administrative unit, euphemism for "Greater Nagaland", by integrating the contiguous Naga-inhabited areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur.

Refusal to compromise

The meeting NDA leaders had with Isak Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah for the first time in Delhi in January last year was significant but it ended with no agenda for the second round after Naga leaders refused to compromise. Several visits abroad by Indian emissary K Padmanabhiyah have since failed to cajole them. He is scheduled to meet them yet again this month and resumption of talks will depend on its outcome.

For six years now, former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee gave the impression that he was sympathetic to the Naga cause. On 28 October last year, a well-attended meeting in Kohima that included Nagas from Manipur's hills was eager to hear straight from the horse's mouth that Nagas would have their homeland. But Mr Vajpayee dropped a bombshell by leaving the contentious integration issue to be decided by a "political consensus" of the three states concerned, particularly Nagaland and Manipur, which, was a closed chapter, at least for now. Given the explosive nature of the issue, the hard-boiled politician in Mr Vajpayee refused to commit himself.

Surprisingly, Muivah's reaction came exactly a month later. "It remains highly questionable and unacceptable," he said, and asserted that "there was a consensus among Nagas and the insistence (on it) is absolutely irrelevant, rather an attempt at shifting responsibility to switch the on-going process off track".

The best the UPA can do is to keep the ceasefire alive — it is

The writer, on The Statesman's staff for more than four decades, specialises on North-east affairs.

about the only substantive outcome of the peace process so far — even if it is mired in controversy and is causing bad blood between Nagas and Manipuris. The rebel cadres are trying to widen their influence in Manipur hills in much the same manner they did in the aftermath of the September 1964 cease-fire Agreement between the underground and the Centre. Manipur was a mere spectator then because the truce, which covered

three of its districts, was signed without the state government being consulted. The resultant build-up later led to Naga-Kuki ethnic clashes in the mid-1990s. Against this background, the UPA needs to review the truce, particularly its terms and conditions, before it expires on 31 July.



former Mizoram governor Swaraj Kaushal spilled the beans. Replacing Padmanabhiyah as chief negotiator following the Naga leaders' refusal to talk to a bureaucrat, Mr Kaushal held the post for only a few weeks and said after his resignation that Mr Vajpayee had, in fact, reneged on his word on the truce's extension.

BJP duplicity

The truce was brokered by former Prime Minister IK Gujral and he was not forthcoming while announcing it in Parliament on 25 July 1997. MPs wanted more information but they were told not to persist, giving rise to the suspicion he was hiding something. Why else would he be so secretive about something the public had every right to know? The truth was out within days of the truce coming into force on 1 August 1997 when rebel Naga leaders claimed it was not confined to Nagaland and that Delhi had "agreed" in principle to cover the contiguous Naga-inhabited areas of the three states. Manipuris were outraged, but timely assurance by the Centre that the state's boundary would not be disturbed saved the situation.

When Mr Vajpayee replaced Mr Gujral, the Naga leaders were so determined to get a definite yes on the truce's juris-

dition that they followed him to Paris in 1998 and, after a 15-minute meeting, announced that "we have already received a clear assurance in this regard (extension of the truce)". Unless Mr Vajpayee gave the nod, would the Naga leaders have been so vocal on this issue time and again, much to the BJP leader's embarrassment?

Mr Vajpayee neither denied nor admitted having given such an assurance, but lawyer and

Last year, the BJP came out with yet another preposterous idea, loosely called the "Padmanabhiyah suggestion", to change Manipur's map by excluding its Ukhrul and Senapati districts, perhaps as an answer to the Nagas' demand. Ukhrul because it is Muivah's home district, and Senapati because the NSCN draws a good number of its cadres from there. All this exemplified the BJP's bankruptcy of ideas on the North-east.

The BJP recognised the uniqueness of the Naga demand purely for its own selfish political ends, the objective being to cultivate militants and so find entry into the Nagaland assembly. It did just that and with ease — sending as many as seven members. Lest it deny the overt militant support, the NSCN-IM information and publicity wing is on record that it "allowed" the BJP to "open an account in the hope it would take steps to solve their problems".

Looming mess

In a way, the BJP must feel greatly relieved that it no longer has to deal with the NSCN-IM, and happy to have put the UPA in a looming mess of its creation. After Mr Vajpayee's October comment, the NSCN-IM no longer acknowledges the BJP's "wisdom and sincerity".

The role of the Naga Hoho (apex body of tribal chiefs), NGOs and church leaders in the peace process has been far from satisfactory. Having proposed that all warring factions be involved for a meaningful dialogue, they should have stuck to it. The Hoho's reconciliation drive has hit a wall, with the NSCN-IM showing little interest. It is clear that even if some understanding is reached with the NSCN-IM, the final settlement must be worked out with leaders of all groups. More priority must be accorded to unity and the form of government the NSCN-IM has in mind, instead of this obsession with integration first. A breakthrough is of the essence.

Many may support former chief minister Hokishe Sema's views that integration "should not be at the cost of disintegrating other communities and (creating) turmoil in the North-east". There obviously are greater risks of the North-east going up in flames if Naga administrative set-up demand is accepted rather than keeping things on hold. But the overriding concern is one of peace — and all good-intentioned groups must work to that end.

First Ulfa blast in bus leaves seven dead

RIPUNJOY DAS

Mathurapur (Sivasagar), June 24: A powerful explosion ripped through a bus in Assam this morning, killing seven passengers, even as top officials brainstormed with chief minister Tarun Gogoi in the state capital to find a way to rein in the outlawed Ulfa.

Police said the blast was the Ulfa's handiwork, but doubts remained over whether the militant group had intended to target a bus, which it had never done before.

The explosion, the third in a fortnight, occurred around 10.15 am inside a Tata 709 minibus headed for Sivasagar from the small town of Sonari. Two youths boarded the vehicle off Sonari and are suspected to have been carrying the bomb.

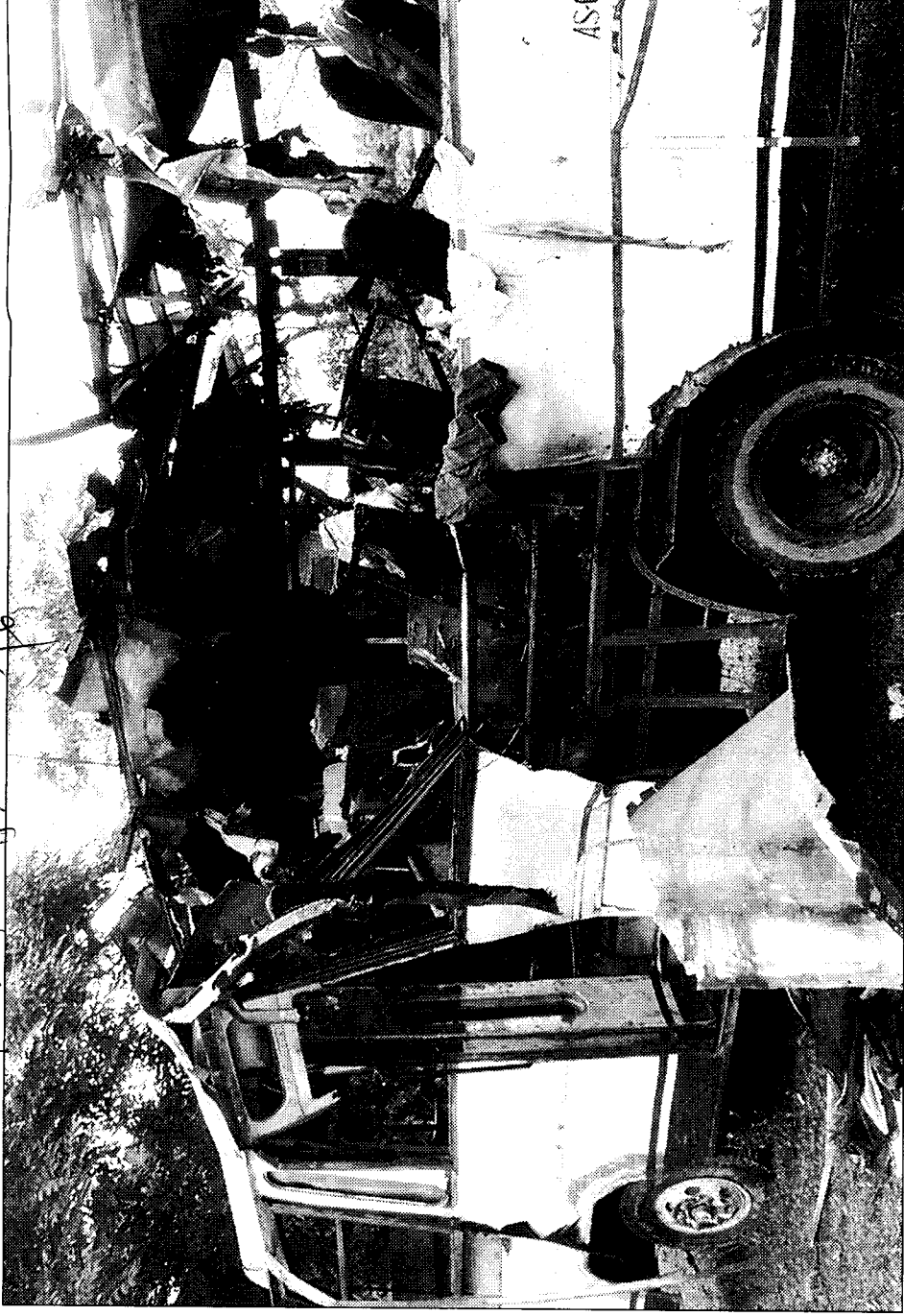
The site of the incident is 28 km from Sivasagar, one of the major towns of Upper Assam, and a km from Mathurapur police station.

The explosion shattered the roof of the vehicle and killed four persons on the spot. Three died while being taken to hospital. The remaining passengers — there were 25 people on the vehicle when the blast occurred — suffered varying degrees of injury. Three of the injured are children.

Only three of the seven who were killed could be identified till late tonight. The police gave their names as Probin Gogoi, Sarbeswar Gogoi and Mukhtar Ali.

The government announced an ex gratia of Rs 1 lakh each to families of the victims and Rs 5,000 to each of those injured.

The driver and the conductor of the bus, Nabin Singh and Safique Ali, escaped with minor injuries because they were at the



The mangled remains of the bus. Picture by Ripunjoy Das

front of the vehicle. "The sound of the blast was deafening. I managed to stop the bus about 200 metres from the site where the explosion occurred," Singh said.

Ali, who was admitted to a health centre in Sonari, said the blast took place minutes after two youths boarded the bus near Mathurapur. He recalled seeing one of the youths carrying a bag.

"We began our journey from

Sonari at 9.45 am with only four passengers. Several people boarded and got off the vehicle between Sonari and Mathurapur. Two youths got into the bus near Mathurapur and I remember they had a bag. The blast took place within minutes of the duo entering the vehicle," Ali said.

It has yet to be ascertained whether the two youths were among the casualties.

Army and CRPF personnel joined the police in combing the area for militant hideouts after the incident. Sniffer dogs were used in the operation. Night curfew was clamped along the nearby Assam-Nagaland border.

Coming within a fortnight of two blasts in Tinsukia town, one inside a cinema hall and another in a crowded marketplace, the bus explosion has set alarm bells

ringing in Dispur.

Chief minister Tarun Gogoi, who was busy working on a security blueprint with deputy commissioners and superintendents of police for company, said his government would not remain

"a mute spectator to inhuman and indiscriminate incidents of violence". He asked the police to get their act together before militants strike again.

OUR BUREAU

Jorhat/Guwahati, June 24: A resurgent and increasingly violent Ulfa has forced the Assam government to temporarily set aside its peace initiative and focus on an all-out offensive against the militant group.

Minister of state for home Rockybul Hussain talked tough after the Ulfa triggered a blast inside a bus in Sivasagar, killing seven passengers. "We will not tolerate terrorist activities. The Ulfa should not think that by offering to hold discussions, the government would sit tight and tolerate the violence being unleashed by its militants. We will deal with those guilty with a firm hand," he said at Jorhat airport, en route to Sivasagar.

The minister said the government would treat the Ulfa like it does any other militant group, irrespective of its initiative to begin a dialogue for peace with the banned outfit.

Hussain said he would meet senior officials immediately after returning to Guwahati to work out "a new strategy" to deal with the Ulfa, which has been most active in the Upper Assam districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh and Sivasagar.

Home commissioner B.K. Gohain accompanied Hussain to Sivasagar. The blast occurred even as deputy commissioners and superintendents of police of all districts went into a huddle at

the Administrative Staff College in Guwahati to prepare a security blueprint for the state.

Chief minister Tarun Gogoi said at the meeting that co-ordination among various law-enforcing and intelligence agencies was the key to the success of any security strategy.

He urged the army police and paramilitary forces, which comprise the three-tier unified command for counter-insurgency operations, to work in tandem.

Hussain's remarks in Jorhat echoed the chief minister's views. He asked officials of Jorhat and Sivasagar districts to intensify security along the areas bordering Nagaland, saying that would prevent militants from carrying out hit-and-run strikes.

As many as 45 militancy-related incidents of violence took place in the state over the last six months, but the Ulfa had never triggered a blast inside a bus till this morning.

Minister of state for defence Bijoy Krishna Handique, who was elected to Parliament from Jorhat, recently said Delhi was amenable to the idea of holding talks with the Ulfa in another country. The chief minister said a few weeks later that he had no objection to anybody mediating between the Ulfa and the government. The statement was in response to filmmaker Jahnu Barua's offer to play mediator.

Gogoi will visit Upper Assam tomorrow.

Tough talk after attack

It's not just Kashmir...

EVEN a cursory look into history would reveal that the North-east was always a part of the scheme in the overall Pakistani strategy. From the very outset, Pakistan showed its disagreement over the territorial division of the country. One time Prime Minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in his book *The Myth of Independence* laid claim to Assam and suggested that he wanted some areas of India's North-east to be included in (undivided) Pakistan.

He wrote: "One of the problems at least is as nearly as important as the Kashmir dispute; that of Assam and some districts of India adjacent to East Pakistan. To these East Pakistan has very good claims, which should not have been allowed to remain quiescent. The eviction of Indian Muslims into East Pakistan and the disputed borders of Assam and Tripura should not be forgotten." Bhutto advocated a policy of "special relationship with non-Hindu population of Assam until this wrong of Assam being an integral part of India can be finally righted." His statement was an open confession of Pakistani designs to convert Assam into a Muslim majority state by pushing the hordes of infiltrators and finally annexing it. Many of the Indian leaders were aware of this Pakistani strategy even earlier.

Such a strategy was reinvigorated after the creation of Bangladesh, which freed Pakistan from the problem of having to defend both East and West Pakistan. The Pakistanis were left with two choices for any future war with India: keep the war as much as possible on the Indian soil or raise the cost of an Indian attack. However, facts would suggest such a Pakistani strategy was well in operation in the 1950s and 1960s as well.

Pakistan's overt involvement in the nascent ethnic movements in the North-east started when the Naga National Council was formed in 1956. Pakistan (East Pakistan) was the first to step in with moral and material support. Pakistan not only gave material support with weapons and training in guerrilla warfare but also attempted to internationalise the issue. NNC leader AZ Phizo, spearheading the Naga insurgency, fled to Dhaka from where he was flown to London on a false passport provided by Pakistan. Naga insurgents, how-

Pakistan's ruling elite, in consonance with the theocratic nature of the Pakistani nation-state, has had eyes on – and a hand in – stirring up the ethnic cauldron in North-east India, writes SATYABRATA RAI CHOWDHURI



A security personnel carries out a body search on a man in Lower Assam. — Eastern Projections

tion of that effort.

From the 1980s, there has been a quantum jump in the covert operations by the Pakistani intelligence agency, the ISI, which has been consistently keeping up its cross-border activities for instigating, supporting and directing insurgent activities in the North-east. The aim of such involvement is clear – to

weaken India's internal security system and to engage India internally so that India's attention is diverted from Kashmir and Pakistan.

At least 18 separate Islamist militant groups have so far been identified by security agencies, with names like Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam, Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam, People's United Liberation Front, Students' Islamic Movement of India, Adam Sena, Jihad Council, etc.

Most of these groups are based in Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta and Nalbari districts in lower Assam, Nagaon and Morigaon districts of central Assam and Cachar, Karinganji and Hatlakandi districts of southern Assam's Barak Valley, besides the Char (alluvial islands) areas in the Brahmaputra river. Islamic fundamentalists have targeted the Northeast and they find their active supporters from these militant groups. They have designs well beyond Kashmir and seek to enlarge the *jihad* so that the "mujahideen" could penetrate into Himachal Pradesh and

the flag of Islam could fly soon on Delhi, Washington and Tel Aviv" claims Islamist literature. ISI plans in the North-east are similar. It plans to train a large number of people in Assam for *jihad* to "liberate Assam and establish an Islamic country comprising territory of the State and certain other parts of the region."

It is now well-known that the ISI is playing an active role in channelling a large quantity of arms discarded by the dreaded Khmer Rouge of Cambodia after its fall; to the insurgent groups in the North-east, including the NSCN, United Liberation Front of Asom and the Bodo groups. The arms are bought by the groups from clandestine markets in Thailand and are shipped to Cox's Bazaar port largely through intelligence operations by the ISI, not very far from the intractable hills of the Tripura-Mizoram frontier and then they are carried as headloads into India.

The arms route is conveniently used for the smuggling of drugs. India's North-east is known for the largest production of opium in the world, until Afghanistan took over in 1999. The infamous drug baron, Khun Sa, has penetrated the Bangladesh-India frontiers quite early and one of the major drug routes passes through Cox's Bazaar. The insurgents who have always been beneficiaries of this trade have jumped into this trade as conduit. They take over the shipment and even direct sales of drugs, thus accruing for themselves the lion's share of the monetary gains out of the deals made by them. No wonder, the ISI is closely involved in this arms-drug deals. This has been confirmed by US intelligence findings.

Siliguri in North Bengal, the gateway to the North-east, is fast becoming a haven for ISI agents. It is a very strategic town, because it shares borders with three countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. The West Bengal government has admitted that the ISI is indeed very active in the area and is using Siliguri as a convenient "corridor". An insurgent leader says this "corridor" is nothing but the Allah's gift to them.

(The author is Professor Emeritus, University Grants Commission, New Delhi.)

Tripura militants kidnap 24 traders

HT Correspondent
Agartala, June 14

TRIBAL MILITANTS struck in the wee hours of Monday abducting as many as 24 Bengali traders in north Tripura. The incident occurred close on the heels of kidnapping of seven persons in Khowai in west Tripura on Sunday.

The kidnapping of the small-time traders from Dasda-Kanpui road triggered tension in Kanchanpur subdivision, bordering Mizoram. Paramilitary troops launched a massive manhunt to track down the militants.

Armed with sophisticated ammunition, militants owing allegiance to outlawed NLFT swooped on the two trucks at Kuri at around 7 am and kidnapped the traders, a senior north district police official said. The trucks were carrying about

40 traders from Dasda to the nearby weekly market at Kanpui.

Initial report said that the militants took away as many as 35 people at gunpoint since others managed to give them a slip in the melee. Militants, however, took 25 people, but later released one Kripamoy Roy on health grounds.

Police confirmed that the militants kidnapped 24 people travelling in two trucks at Kuri, not far away from Mizoram and Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh. It is believed that the traders disappeared into the densely forested Chittagong Hill Tracts where NLFT set up a number of hideouts.

Usually the traders are held hostage for ransom money. Militant outfits in Tripura usually take recourse to this method to negotiate ransom as an easy way to raise funds. At least

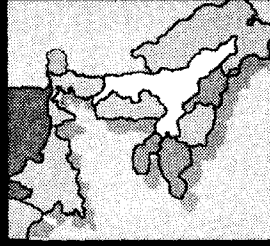
three thousand people irrespective of social and economic status were kidnapped so far over the last seven years.

An edgy state administration has swung into action. District magistrate Debotosh Dutta and SP (North) Arvind Singh, who assumed office last weekend, rushed to the spot with heavy contingent of police and paramilitary forces. He is supervising the combing operation launched by BSE, TSR and armed police personnel.

On Sunday ATTF militants kidnapped five Bengali labourers at Kuchubari in Khowai, west Tripura. The kidnapped—Arjun Das, Sushen Das, Sunil Das, Suklal Das and Mithun Das—are yet to be traced.

Opposition parties today have serious concerns over the sudden spurt in kidnappings in different parts of the state.

NORTH by NORTH EAST



SANJOY HAZARIKA

Naga demands: A tentative formula

THE Naga Hoho, the once vibrant platform for tribes among the Nagas which was reduced to a shell of its former self by pressure from major insurgent groups, is now trying to revive itself. Led by its president, N Vero, a five-member team arrived in New Delhi to meet leaders of the Manmohan Singh government as well as former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and others.

At the time of writing, they had met Vajpayee, Mrs Sonia Gandhi and home minister Shivraj Patil. The visit has a one-point agenda: it is the speeding up of the talks for an "honourable and just settlement based on the integration of all continuous Naga areas, full respecting historical and natural justice." The Naga leaders are sharply opposed to the ruling coalition's Common Minimum Programme which declares that "the territorial integrity of existing states will be maintained," a reference to the Naga demand for integration of territories currently in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur and want this clause removed. The Naga demand is strongly opposed by the neighbouring states.

Vero and others maintain that this is setting conditions to the ongoing negotiations which are supposed to be "unconditional"; it's clear that whatever the public posturing of both sides, the NSCN (I-M) is focusing on integration and not on "sovereignty" which many Nagas know is near-impossible. Where will the talks go if integration is not possible, is their concern. The NSCN too has indicated that it is closely reviewing the situation although the cease-fire extension comes up at the end of the month and a consultation between the two sides is likely at Bangkok.

While understanding the concerns of the Nagas, as we have said before, it is also important that they realise that other sides also have a written history and chronicles, going back hundreds of years, especially Manipur and Assam. The Nagas are unique in the sense that they have kept up an armed struggle and consistent political position over the past 50-odd years in terms of their historical perspective.

But this is a world where ground realities matter as much as emotions and views. The ground reality is that frontiers were drawn decades ago, that states exist under a Constitutional arrangement and these borders matter as much to existing states and peoples as do the Naga demands to Nagas. Confidence building measures are necessary among communities, to reduce tension and suspicion, involving scholars, policy makers and analysts, media and non-government organisations. Without an understanding between peoples of the states, it will be difficult to push through an agreement.

Following one's observations, visits to the region and interactions with leaders on all sides over a number of years, the following tentative formula may be considered to nudge the process forward:

One, that an expert committee, comprising demographic specialists, scholars and former officials who are respected by all sides, be set up to consider the historical and contemporary situation with regard to communities living on either side of the existing borders;

Two, that the team's recommendations be submitted to governments and relevant organisations for detailed discussions of the findings in a move toward a long-term settlement;

Three, that without prejudice to a political resolution of the issues, that the traditional residency of ethnic groups which have lived and co-existed in these areas for generations be recognised.

Ulfa opens door to hope

By Bijay Sankar Bora

By declaring that his group is prepared for peace talks with New Delhi, Arobinda Rajkhowa, chairman of the banned United Liberation Front of Assam which seeks an independent Assam and which has kept a low-profile after it got a battering from the Bhutanese Army last December, is back to the centre of attention in the North-east.

In one move, Ulfa has also shifted the onus to the new Congress-led coalition in Delhi. The Ulfa leader has, however, not failed to reiterate their old demands in a long, email interview with an Assamese newspaper, the *Dainik Janabhoomi*, that the "talks must be focused on the demand for sovereignty" and that the Centre must show sincerity in finding a political solution through negotiations. Militarily weakened by its losses in Bhutan, Ulfa, however, continued to bluster despite opening the door for dialogue.

Ulfa and two other armed groups, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland and the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation, suffered heavy casualties in the Bhutanese crackdown which forced many to flee to the Indian side where Army troops and other forces were waiting. The severe mauling denied their confidence as well as their public standing and deprived them of a sanctuary where they had lived for over 12 years.

Unlike many earlier occasions, when Ulfa showed a tendency to ridicule the very mention of peace talks, this time the group has responded promptly to a statement made by Union minister of state for defence, Bijoy Krishna Handique, that too in a somewhat ambiguous yet positive manner, stirring hope and interest in political and media circles.

Handique, keenly aware of the problem, had made a well-phrased and calibrated statement that the new Central government was not averse to hold talks with Ulfa in a foreign country. Indeed, he has stressed that such talks were being held with other groups, a reference to the NSCN as well as smaller organisations — so why not with Ulfa?

While New Delhi hasn't yet given its official seal of approval to Handique's statement, it should be aware that the low-key and pleasant politician's remarks has generated good public response as well as the opening from Ulfa. Of course, Ulfa's chairman also spoke



Bhimkanta Buragohain, senior Ulfa leader who was apprehended by the Royal Bhutan Army, hands over an appeal to Lt. General Mohinder Singh at Tezpur on 28 December. — PTI

of the group's usual position of talks in the presence of a UN representative but that is seen simply as rhetoric. It will be prudent on the part of the United Progressive Alliance government to capitalise on the response and send a positive signal to Ulfa. This is especially important since the earlier NDA government, particularly home minister LK Advani, was regarded as extremely hostile to Ulfa and did not favour talks with it.

Hawks in the government should not try to brush aside the Ulfa statement as a reflection of its plight after its losses in Bhutan. All political forces in Assam as well as intellectuals and non-government

groups have made it clear that the solution to the problem of insurgency lay in sustained and sincere political negotiations and not military force. The Army has been engaged in low intensity, counter insurgency operations in Assam since 1990 and has seen the value of discussions, especially after talks with the NSCN (I-M), arguably the mother of insurgency in the North-east, have continued for seven years and reduced tension in Nagaland.

Influential figures and social organisations in Assam, who yearn for peace, must mount

Bangladesh to resume the struggle.

It is a hard reality in Assam that notwithstanding the constant pressure from the security forces, Ulfa has not found recruitment of new cadre very difficult. The burgeoning number of the unemployed — over 16 lakh officially including over 11 lakh educated who have nothing to do — has made the task much easier for the seduction of the frustrated and insecure. While hundreds of disillusioned Ulfa leaders and cadre have said farewell to arms since 1991 and the organisation has lost its popular base, yet vulnerable youth continue to fall under its spell, especially for economic reasons.

The Ulfa chairman's remarks tossing the ball in the Centre's court have raised a flicker of hope in this troubled state. What is significant from Rajkhowa's interview is that there is no difference of opinion among top leaders that political negotiations could be an effective means of arriving at a solution.

The other side of the coin is that Ulfa continues to spout rhetoric; it continues to hold the son of an Assam minister from Karbi Anglong, kidnapped recently, demanding the release of senior leaders held after the Bhutan operation as well as a large amount of money as ransom. It still attaches strings to the talks, which it wants to be held on foreign soil. It wants its demand for independence to be the focus of negotiations. But it does not apparently want to put up an impassable hurdle to kick-starting a peace process. The NSCN (I-M) too is known to have waged a war against the Indian state to attain "freedom for the Naga people". It still maintains a well-trained standing army and continues to recruit cadre to its cause. These days, while the cease-fire and peace process continues with the Naga group, the debate is more on its demand for a the integration of all Naga-inhabited lands (including chunks of land in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur) instead of a sovereign Nagaland. This is a huge step forward in realism and practical politics.

It always pays to engage in negotiation. The peace settlement in Mizoram of 1986 which ended two decades of insurgency and bloodshed and converted the state into the country's most peaceful area stands out as a powerful example. It may be time to break the ice with Ulfa.

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

pressure on both Ulfa and the Government of India to sit across the negotiation table and silence the guns in the state. It has happened in Nagaland and it could happen in Assam. Nagaland has seen a strong movement for peace at different levels as well as backing for the negotiations which were initiated by the NSCN (I-M).

There are of course grounds to believe that Ulfa may be trying to buy time by allowing its moderates to talk about peace. In such a case, a prompt response from the Centre to the call for peace talks on foreign soil will go a long way in disarming the outfit's designs.

It should be remembered that New Delhi had negotiated with Arobinda Rajkhowa over a decade ago, when weakened by fierce military pressure on its cadre and organisation, Ulfa had come for talks to the Indian capital. Rajkhowa had himself met with the then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, accepted a settlement within the framework of the Indian Constitution and declared a cease-fire. This fell apart within weeks after sustained pressure from Paresch Barua, the commander of the Ulfa army, and Rajkhowa and other pro-talk leaders fled to

Open forum

Perfidious Ulfa

SF-B
10/6 Kid-glove policy no longer valid *N.B. 5/7*

By holding Assam animal husbandry minister GC Langthasa's son hostage since 27 April, the Ulfa again shows its ugly face. It is demanding the release of seven senior functionaries missing since last December's Bhutan military operation and are believed to be in the Indian Army's custody. But were this been the main reason, why did it leave a Rs 3-crore ransom note, giving rise to suspicions of extortion? And why, more importantly, did it pick on a minister from Karbi Anglong? The Ulfa's abduction modus has not changed much since 1991. It started losing public sympathy following rampant abduction of Assam government and ONGC officials as also a Russian technician working with Coal India who, it felt, would afford maximum publicity to its cause of "swadhin Asom". But when it killed the Russian in an "encounter" and refused to hand over the body despite pleas from the family, its duplicity was exposed. The then Saikia government did free most of the deteneue to ensure safety of hostages, but times are changing

The 1997 abduction of Sanjoy Ghosh, an NGO official engaged in anti-erosion measures in Majuli, shook public conscience. When and how he was killed is not known, the Ulfa version was that he died after a fall from a cliff. The most one can sensibly hope for in the minister's son's case is that he will be returned unharmed — something Dispur must ensure. Giving in to Ulfa's demand will only embolden the militants. With their backs to the wall, Ulfa hardliners have little choice but to indulge in such activities. Harsh action demands equally brutal reaction and lest the Ulfa forget, Operation Rhino is yet to be officially withdrawn. (

10 JUN 2002

1004

Ulfa blasts Assam theatre, 23

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, June 9

ULFA MILITANTS struck in a big way injuring 23 persons, eight of them seriously, in a grenade attack in a crowded cinema in the business township of Tinsukia in upper Assam today.

"Twenty-three people were injured when the militants hurled a grenade at the Paradise cinema in the heart of the town screening a Hindi movie," Tinsukia Deputy Commissioner Sanjay Lohiya said.

He added that the attack might be an offshoot of the ban called by the Ulfa on the screening of Hindi movies last year which was opposed by the state film industry and the subsequent blasts about three months ago in cinema halls of neighbouring Sibsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat districts.

The DCP said those seriously injured have been rushed to Assam Medical College Hospital in Dibrugarh, while the others are treated at Tinsukia Civil Hospital.

A search operation has

been launched in the entire district to nab the culprits who escaped immediately after the incident, he said. However, no arrests have been made so far. People who were nearby said they heard a loud blast around 1 pm following which there was panic as people rushed out of the cinema hall.

This was the third cinema hall blast in upper Assam after the Ulfa had called for ban on Hindi films. The state administration has beefed up security measures around the cinema

halls after today's incident.

Hindi-speaking people are a majority in Tinsukia. The town was badly affected during anti-Bihari violence in November last year.

Screening of Hindi films dropped drastically everywhere, except Guwahati, after the Ulfa imposed the ban.

There were two other blasts in cinema halls at Nazira in Sibsagar district and Sibsagar where Hindi movies were screened. Three people were killed and several others were injured in the incident.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 JUN 2002

Ulfa ties talks to sovereignty

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, June 8. — The United Liberation Front of Assam has stated that it is not averse to talks with the Centre in a foreign country provided the latter is sincere enough in finding a solution to the problem through dialogue.

In an interview given through e-mail to a vernacular daily here, the chairman of the banned outfit, Mr Arobinda Rajkhowa, clarified that its demand for “sovereignty” must be discussed in any dialogue with the Centre. “There’s no question of giving up the primary goal of attaining an independent Assam after so many sacrifices during the 25-year-long struggle so far,” the Ulfa leader said. He, however, didn’t sound rigid in the outfit’s demand for the presence of a UN representative during talks with the Centre. Mr Rajkhowa said: “There’s no difference of opinion among Ulfa leaders about the reality that dialogue is one of the plausible ways to find a political solution to the ‘Assam-India’ conflict.”

The Ulfa chairman’s statement has come in response to a recent statement by Union minister of state for defence Mr Bijoy Krishna Handique, who had said the new government was not against holding peace talks with militant groups of Assam in foreign land, provided no strings were attached to such meetings.

During an interaction with the media at his home town Jorhat, Mr Handique had said: “When you consider the world as a global village, holding talks with militants in another country should not be a problem. Holding dialogue is more important than the venue of negotiation.”

The banned outfit had long back outlined two primary pre-conditions for a dialogue with New Delhi: talks should be held in a third country under UN supervision and that the dialogue should centre around the Ulfa’s demand for ‘sovereignty’ of Assam. Successive state governments — including the incumbent Congress government — had urged the Centre to agree to hold dialogue with the Ulfa abroad, as was done in the case of the NSCN-IM and Mizo National Front. The previous NDA government, however, had ruled out talks with any militant outfit that had set pre-conditions.

Mr Rajkhowa claimed that despite the anti-militant operation in Bhutan last year, four of its five “battalions are still very much active... Why does the government continue with the unified command structure in Assam if the Ulfa has ceased to exist?”

Local anaesthesia

8/6 N-E needs communal harmony 5/1-8

Development in the North-east hill states depends on locals and outsiders striving equally to preserve communal harmony. The economy of the Bodo Territorial Council depends entirely on non-Bodos, who constitute a majority. Now that the council comes under the Sixth Schedule, non-Bodos cannot own property, but the interests of permanent settlers must be safeguarded. The Inner Line Permit system in Arunachal, Mizoram and Nagaland has not curbed infiltration, giving rise to questions even if it is too late to right wrongs. But these states could not have built houses and offices without importing labour. One recalls the people of Meghalaya boasting of building a satellite township near Shillong with local labour, which would have been exceptional had they used local material.

Over the past decade or so there have been reports of non-locals, particularly businessmen, being killed in Meghalaya. Mercifully even when Khasi students were forcibly deporting outsiders in 1988, outsiders exercised restraint. But with electronic media exposing incidents, visuals do generate feelings. Last month two outsiders allegedly murdered a Mizo woman in Aizawl following which an irate crowd set upon non-locals. Administration did prevent things from turning ugly but this was not unnoticed. After watching the victims and hearing their accounts over a Kolkata TV channel, an organisation calling itself "Amra Bangali" is said to have warned the Mizoram government of dangerous consequences. Some weeks ago, a Kolkata group also warned Naga students over threats to oust non-locals. The governments concerned cannot take this lightly.

দিল্লির জোট সরকারের অভিন্ন কর্মসূচিতে ক্ষুব্ধ নাগাল্যান্ডের জঙ্গিরা

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, আগরতলা, ৫ জুন: নাগা জঙ্গিরা ফের চটে গিয়েছে। কেন্দ্রে ইউপিএ সরকারের অভিন্ন ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচিতে (সিএমপি) রাজ্যগুলির অখণ্ডতা রক্ষার প্রতিশ্রুতিই চটিয়ে দিয়েছে স্বঘোষিত 'নাগালিম সরকারের' কর্ণধারদের। কেন্দ্রে নতুন সরকার আসার পরে তড়িঘড়ি করে জঙ্গিদের তরফ থেকে জানানো হয়েছিল, এ বার বিদেশবাসী নাগা জঙ্গি নেতারা দিল্লিতে এসে শান্তি-আলোচনা করবেন। কিন্তু সিএমপি দেখার পর তাঁরা বুঝেছেন, কেন্দ্রের কর্মসূচি তাঁদের কৌশলের ভিত্তিমূলেই আঘাত করছে। ফলে নেতারা কুপিত।

ন্যাশনাল সোসালিস্ট কাউন্সিল অফ নাগালিমের (এনএসসিএন-আই এম) নেতা ফুনথিং শিমরাং নাগাল্যান্ডের ডিমাপুর থেকে বৃহস্পতিবার টেলিফোনে বলেন, "নাগা জাতির একীকরণের ব্যাপারে ভারতের নতুন সরকার কী নীতি গ্রহণ করতে চায় সেটা আগে পরিষ্কার জানাতে হবে। তার উপরেই নির্ভর করছে আমাদের নেতারা দিল্লিতে আসবেন কি না। ২০০৩ সালে দুই নেতা আইজাক চিসি স্যু ও থুইঙ্গালেং মুইভা দিল্লি গিয়েছিলেন শুভেচ্ছা সফরে। বিগত ৩৬ বছরের মধ্যে সেই প্রথম নাগালিম সরকারের কেউ ভারতে পা রাখেন।

এনডিএ সরকার নাগা সমস্যা সমাধানে আগ্রহী ছিল বলেই আইজাক ও মুইভা তাতে সাড়া দেন। কিন্তু কেন্দ্রে ক্ষমতা বদলের পর নতুন সরকারের ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচি দেখে আমাদের মনে হচ্ছে, দিল্লি আবার ফিরে যেতে চাইছে পুরনো রাস্তায়। ফলে নাগা জাতির রাজনৈতিক সমস্যা সমাধানে ভারত সরকার তার নীতি স্পষ্ট করে না জানালে নাগালিম সরকারের পক্ষ থেকেও সদর্ধক সাড়া দেওয়া সম্ভব নয়।"

উল্লেখ্য, ইউপিএ সরকারের কর্মসূচি ঘোষণার আগে গতমাসের শেষদিকে এনএসসিএনের 'তথ্য ও প্রচার মন্ত্রকের ডেপুটি কিলোনসর (মন্ত্রী)' কারাইবো চাওয়াং বিবৃতি দিয়ে জানিয়েছিলেন ব্যাঙ্ক থেকে তাদের দুই সর্বোচ্চ নেতা চলতি মাসে দিল্লি আসবেন পরবর্তী দফার শান্তি-আলোচনায় অংশ নিতে। কিন্তু পরে সরকারি কর্মসূচিতে প্রতিটি রাজ্যের অখণ্ডতা রক্ষার কথা দেখে জঙ্গিদের সুর বদলে গিয়েছে। কারণ, এনডিএ সরকারের সঙ্গে শান্তি-আলোচনায় জঙ্গি সংগঠনের প্রধান দাবিই ছিল 'পূর্ণাঙ্গ নাগাল্যান্ড' রাজ্য গঠন, যা 'বৃহত্তর নাগাল্যান্ড' বলে অন্যত্র পরিচিত হয়ে আসছে। নাগা জাতির 'পূর্ণাঙ্গ' রাজ্য গঠনের জন্য মণিপুর রাজ্যের পাহাড়ি এলাকার প্রায় পুরোটা, অরুণাচল প্রদেশ এবং অসমের বড়

অংশ কেটে নিয়ে নাগাল্যান্ডের সঙ্গে জুড়ে দেওয়ার বায়না করে আসছে এনএসসিএন। গতবছর প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী কোহিমা সফরে গিয়ে বলেন, "বৃহত্তর নাগাল্যান্ড তৈরির জন্য প্রতিবেশী রাজ্যগুলোর মধ্যে মতৈক্য না হওয়া অবধি কেন্দ্রের বিষয়ে সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে পারে না।"

এই বক্তব্যের ফলে এই অঞ্চলে এই বিতর্ক ধামাচাপা পড়ার বদলে ছাইচাপা আঙনের রূপ নিয়েছে বলে মনে করেন মণিপুরের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ওকরাম ইবোবি সিংহ। তাঁর মতে, "ও কথা বলে বাজপেয়ী নাগাল্যান্ডের প্রতিবেশী তিন রাজ্যের নাগা অধ্যুষিত এলাকাগুলোয় এনএসসিএন-কে সাংগঠনিক শক্তি বাড়াতেই প্রকারান্তরে উপদেশ দিয়ে যান। যার প্রমাণ দেখা গিয়েছে সাম্প্রতিক লোকসভা ভোটে আউটার মণিপুর কেন্দ্রে, যেখানে নাগাল্যান্ড থেকে আসা জঙ্গিদের খোলা বন্দুকের জোরে একজন নির্দল প্রার্থী জিতেছেন। ওই কেন্দ্রে নাগা জাতি ছাড়াও কুর্কি স্ট্রু আরও অন্য জাতির ভোটার আছেন। কিন্তু তাঁদের ভোটই দিতে দেয়নি নাগা জঙ্গিরা।"

তবে এনএসসিএনের রাজনৈতিক লাভালাভের অঙ্ক কষার বাইরে নাগাল্যান্ডের সাধারণ মানুষের একটা বড় অংশই এখন চর্চা রাজ্যে শান্তি আসুক। কোহিমা থেকে টেলিফোনে এ কথাই শোনালেন ব্যাপটিস্ট চার্চ সোসাইটির আংখুমি সেমা। তিনি বলেন, "নাগাল্যান্ডে ১৯৪৭ থেকে ২৫ হাজারেরও বেশি খুন হয়েছেন নাগা স্বাধীনতার নামে সন্ত্রাসবাদ ও সরকারি বাহিনীর হাতে। আমরা সাধারণ মানুষ দু'পক্ষের দড়ি-টানাটানি থেকে মুক্তি চাই, নাগাল্যান্ডে শান্তি চাই, এই অঞ্চলে অনাবশ্যিক রক্ত ঝরা বন্ধ হোক দেখে যেতে চাই। তাই একবার কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের সঙ্গে যখন শান্তি নিয়ে আলোচনা শুরু হয়েছে, সেটা কোনও কারণ দেখিয়ে যেন কোনও পক্ষই ভেঙে না দেয়।"

প্রদেশ কংগ্রেসের কার্যনির্বাহী সভাপতি হোখেতো সুমি বলেন, "প্রতিবেশী রাজ্যের নাগারা চাইলে নাগাল্যান্ডে চলে আসতে পারেন। এই ভাবে নাগা জাতির একীকরণ সম্ভব। তবে অন্য রাজ্যের এলাকা কেটে নিয়ে নাগাল্যান্ডে জুড়ে দেওয়ার দাবি অত্যন্ত অন্যায়। সেটাই করে চলেছে জঙ্গিরা। কংগ্রেসের নতুন জোট সরকার জঙ্গিদের সুরে কথা বলতে রাজি নয় আঁচ করেই এনএসসিএন শান্তি প্রক্রিয়া ভেঙে দিতে চাইছে এবং তারা এর পরেই আবার উত্তর পূর্বে সন্ত্রাস ছড়ানোর কাজ পুরোদমে শুরু করে দেবে বলেই আমাদের ধারণা।"

Thus far and...

Peace rests with NSCN-IM leaders

Naga peace talks are not likely to resume in June despite Indian negotiator K Padmanabhiiah's assurance that Delhi's change of guard will not "adversely" affect the process. What could possibly queer the pitch is the clause in the UPA's Common Minimum Programme that it would maintain the "territorial integrity of north-eastern states". This has been the crux of the problem. At their first meeting with Central leaders in Delhi in January last year, Isak Swu and Th Muivah demanded a single administrative unit for Nagas, meaning the integration of all contiguous Naga-inhabited areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur. Unless the NSCN-IM leaders agree to drop the demand, it could well be the end of the whole affair.

Newly-elected Nagaland MP Wangyuh Konyak is angry about the clause, asserting that "if the will of the people is supreme we will have the final say". This implies that his Nagaland People's Front, the main constituent of the ruling Democratic Alliance of Nagaland, is solidly behind the NSCN demand. Not surprising though, because Konyak could not have won the lone parliamentary seat by a majority of more than 150,000 without NSCN-IM backing. The other partner — BJP — is also unhappy but its legislature party leader, Hokishe Sema, says that unification "should not be at the cost of disintegrating other communities and (causing) turmoil in the North-east", a remark that has led to the souring of an otherwise excellent BJP-NSCN-IM relationship. Having come so far, it would be disastrous if Naga leaders decide to back out. Hopefully, both sides will make efforts to find a compromise formula.

Ulfa abducts minister's son

Offers trade-off with seven rebels

Rahul Karmakar
Guwahati, May 30

UNITED LIBERATION Front of Assam (Ulfa) militants have kidnapped the son of an Assam minister, saying he would be freed only if New Delhi persuades Thimpu to release seven of the outfit's leaders.

Bhutan is believed to have imprisoned the seven during a military operation last December to flush out Ulfa, NDFB and KLO militants camping in that country.

Interestingly, the Ulfa admitted to abducting Nirmalendu Langthasa, the fourth son of Hill Areas Development Minister Gobinda Chandra Langthasa, over a month after he went missing near Haflong on April 27. Equally mysteriously, Nirmalendu's wife Lucy lodged an FIR at the Haflong police station in North Cachar Hills district only on May 26.

The police had initially suspected Hmar militants, who had killed another of Langthasa's four sons last year, but a note issued by Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa late on Sunday changed the picture.

The note said Nirmalendu would be held hostage until "New Delhi and Thimpu get their act together" and set seven of his comrades free.

These seven include dreaded militants as Rabin Neog, Ashanta Baghphukan and Bening Rabha, all of

them "majors" in the Ulfa's armed wing. These seven and scores of other Ulfa, NDFB and KLO militants have not been heard of since the Bhutanese army demolished over 20 guerrilla camps across southern Bhutan in December.

The flushout forced over 500 militants to surrender.

"We are trying to establish the veracity of the Ulfa note," IGP (Special Branch) Khagen Sarma said.

He said the Ulfa had earlier issued an "unsealed" demand note seeking a ransom of Rs 3 crore for Nirmalendu's release. Langthasa is not the only Assam minister to have been targeted by militants. Bru insurgents had abducted Pratul Chandra Deb, uncle of Social Welfare Minister Gautam Roy, last April.

Deb, a retired teacher in London, was whisked away from the Katlicherra area of Barak Valley, apparently for ransom. Unable to trace him, the police last week handed the search over to the paramilitary.

In another development, MoS for Defence Bijay Krishna Handique today said the Congress-led UPA government was ready to hold talks with the North-east ultras.

Handique said, "We are ready to hold talks with N-E ultras at any place and at any moment they are willing to hold negotiations.... Our doors open for them."

Naga talks to continue

Bharti Jain
NEW DELHI 30 MAY

THE Congress may be perceived to be closer to Naga rebel group NSCN (Khaplang) than NSCN (Isak-Muivah), with which the Centre is in a dialogue, but it is unlikely to replace the NSCN(I-M) as the key negotiator on behalf of Nagas.

Union home minister Shivraj Patil, who has been briefed by Centre's interlocutor for Naga talks, K. Padmanabhaiah, on the progress made so far, is said to be keen to take the dialogue forward and wants the NSCN(I-M) leadership to visit India for the next round according to their pre-election plans. However, sources said a decision on the timing may be taken only after Parliament session ends on June 10.

Although the Centre is in a ceasefire pact with NSCN(Khaplang) since 2001, it has not embarked on a dialogue with its leaders. In fact, the authorities here are convinced that it's the Isak-Muivah faction that is the supreme representative of Naga interests both in terms of its acceptability among the Nagas as well as its manpower/ combat strength.

This was apparent from the outcome of the Nagaland Assembly elections, held in February last year, when candidates tacitly supported by the NSCN(I-M) emerged victorious even as the NSCN(Khap-

lang)'s backing for the Congress failed to get former chief minister S. C. Jamir another term in office. This not only reinforced the NSCN(I-M)'s superior status as a negotiator on behalf of the Nagas but also cautioned the Centre against unnecessarily giving too much importance to the Khaplang faction.

It was probably after this that the Centre's interlocutor, K. Padmanabhaiah, focused his parleys entirely on the NSCN(I-M), setting aside speculation of a parallel dialogue with the Khaplang faction. Authorities here are of the opinion that involving smaller groups at this stage would only complicate matters as Mr Padmanabhaiah would have to deal with different and diverse voices. It is to avoid such confusion in preliminary stages that the Centre does not want to engage groups other than the NSCN(I-M) until some sort of breakthrough is imminent. Only then do the authorities want to bring in groups like the NSCN(Khaplang) and Naga National Council (NNC). The purpose would be to give the latter an opportunity to lay down their views before any settlement is reached so that a consensus can be built.

However, sources familiar with the ongoing Naga talks concede that a breakthrough in the negotiations may be far away. Just before the country went into the election mode, the NSCN(I-M) had been convinced by Mr Padmanabhaiah to come to India for a second time for further talks.

The Economic Times

31 MAY 2004

N - E - State

5/10 **AGP shining!** 15/5

And some comfort for Congress

Blanked out in 1998 and 1999, the AGP has returned with a bang in the Lok Sabha elections. Its candidate from the Dibrugarh constituency, former Aasu chief Sarbananda Sonowal, wrested the seat from Congress and it also won in Lakhimpur. Bhupen Hazarika, the BJP's star turn for the prestigious Guwahati seat, realised soon enough that Atal Behari Vajpayee may have changed his life but not for the better. The celebrated Assamese singer may now have to live with being "that humiliated BJP leader". If the BJP, despite fielding former secretary of the Assam Tea Tribes Students Union, KP Tassa, from Dibrugarh, made no dent in the tea belt, it was because the electorate resented the party's "India shining" and "Feel good" cacophony. Considering the BJP's high profile campaigns and determination to sweep the Assam polls, the Congress did remarkably well by retaining nine seats, one short of 1999. Its win from Guwahati neutralises the setback it suffered in Dibrugarh (where its party president, Pawan Singh Ghatowar, was humbled), despite the nursing from 1952. Significantly, it bagged the Karbi Anglong ST seat.

The Naga People's Front candidate, W Konyak, set a record of sorts by defeating the Congress sitting member by more than 450,000 votes. A constituent of the ruling Democratic Alliance of Nagaland, the party is known to identify with the underground and there were allegations of large-scale rigging with the help of militants and state government officials, with minors being allowed to vote — a fit case for an Election Commission probe. The victory of the Mizo National Front, an NDA ally, also a victory for National Trinamul Congress leader Purno Sangma retaining Tura, was a foregone conclusion. Now with the Congress having one each from Meghalaya and Manipur, the North-east together sends only 11 MPs, four short of 1999. Nevertheless, this offers some comfort for the party's centrist command.

THE STATESMAN 15 MAY 2004

Truce abuse

Need for uniform code

If ceasefire agreements with rebel outfits are to produce results, a uniform code would help. When the Mizo National Front opted for peace in the 1980s and the Bodo Liberation Tigers in 2002, the Centre did not ask them to surrender arms. Both factions of the NSCN, observing a truce, are allowed to retain arms. The precondition that the Ulfa and Manipur rebel outfits lay down their weapons before talks is the main hindrance towards initiating a dialogue. In a sense, insistence on this counts for little because even if they do, they could as easily buy weapons on the open market as and when occasion arises. Last week, 72 cadres of Montu Koloy faction of the National Liberation Front of Tripura, which signed a truce with the Centre in April, surrendered but all they showed was 22 weapons, mostly country-made. An encouraging pointer, however, was the statement by the Nayanbashi Jamatia faction of the NLFT, which is also observing a truce, that it would cancel an arms deal in Thailand and close down all training camps in Bangladesh, confirming the Left Front's repeated allegations of their existence, something which Dhaka may find hard to deny.

There will be no relief, however, until one more NLFT faction — of Bishwamohan Debbarma — and the All Tripura Tiger Force also fall in line. Over the past 12 years, thousands of rebels have responded to government promises of rehabilitation with no noticeable improvement in the law and order situation. Because most belonged to insignificant groups, floated by unemployed youths without ideology but to take advantage of rehabilitation programmes. If truce has to promote peace, it must be worth the paper it is written on.

THE STATESMAN 2 MAY 2004

'Naga integration should not disintegrate others'

NAGALAND has completed polling with a high voter turnout, a complete contrast to the boycott some years ago, backed by the underground, which propelled SC Jamir of the Congress Party again to power. Last year, Jamir was ousted in the Assembly elections and Neiphiu Rio seized power. In the light of the blistering attack by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland on the BJP as untrustworthy and duplicitous (they also reportedly kidnapped a number of BJP workers and supported an independent candidate in the Outer Manipur constituency), it is interesting to review a statement issued before the elections on the ongoing peace process between New Delhi and the Nagas, made by Hokishe Sema, state BJP chief, a former chief minister and a current M.L.A. It is also a warning to the present chief minister and drew a furious and predictable response from the NSCN (I-M).

Document

"The Democratic Alliance of Nagaland promised an early political settlement in our Common Minimum Programme... Thirteen months have elapsed and we are still at the starting point... Our government has been charged with delaying with a view to get more resources commensurate to our requirements. The present situation is that our Naga brothers in all factions are required to collect funds for their own survival... A very costly peace.

"The present trend is not on the right line. The policy to maintain equi-closeness with all factions is not on our Common Minimum Programme. Equi-closeness corroborates us in all their actions good as well as bad. As Naga representatives, we must give correct inputs so that our brothers in the NSCN can arrive at a good and acceptable solution. We are silent spectators to cease-fire ground rules and cannot remain contented with only publicity value.

"Given the stance of both GOI and NSCN, especially on the question of Sovereignty and

Integration of Naga areas, a deadlock may arise... I appeal to all members to take a keen interest and shoulder responsibility... so that a Final Settlement is possible with dignity not only for the NSCN but also all Nagas.

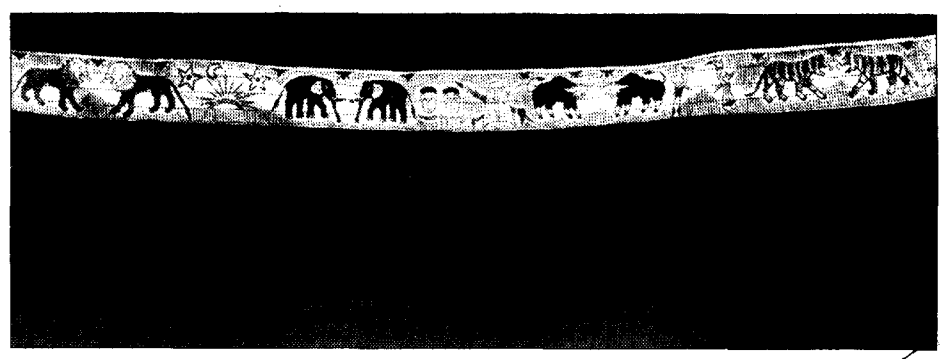
"This august House has passed a Bill for the handing over of continuous Naga-inhabited areas to Nagaland many times. This is technically different from the demand for territorial integration of Naga areas by NSCN. Any solution to be acceptable has to be with the intent of maintaining good relations with neighbours, whether it is India, Myanmar, Manipur, Arunachal or Assam, in future. Naga integration should not disintegrate other communities and cause turmoil in the region. Without this basic change in approach, we are heading for a deadlock in negotiations.

"More than half a century of living under different administrations has effected the perception of people towards a common Naga state. Tribal interests are also a weakness... Tribal affinities will dictate future relations and it may be worth considering having more than one Naga state with special status and facilities as in now enjoyed in Nagaland but under a social and cultural umbrella organisation in the first phase.

The statement says that the lack of organised popular movements by Nagas in other parts of the North-east demanding integration had made the "case weak in the eyes of India and the world."

"In 1947, Nagas declared independence and since then have struggled with India to achieve this goal. Many Nagas have sacrificed their lives... Barriers are breaking down because practical aspects of life and freedom to the people have taken priority.

"Similarly, in our context what we want is that the Naga people be free and developed. Peoples' sovereignty should be foremost... In the present world, there is no absolute sovereignty."



Sikkim on the map

With this move, the Chinese have greatly helped the cause of Indo-Sino cooperation

ALTHOUGH it was expected for a long time, China's correction of its official maps to include Sikkim as part of India is a welcome step. This is in keeping with the growing ties between the two countries, a process that was given a notable boost during Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit to China last year. In fact, it was during that visit that Beijing made it clear that it considers Sikkim a part of India. Even earlier there were enough indications that it would accept this reality since it was willing to establish border trading posts on the Sikkim-Tibet border. Such posts, by definition, denote the administrative control, if not their sovereignty, of the nations involved. The devil as usual was in the detail with respect to the exact location of these posts. And this was essentially sorted out by the time the prime minister had travelled to China.

The real significance of the depiction of Sikkim as part of India in China's official maps is that it indicates the willingness of China — and India — to work on the basis of reality. The cynics might say that the Chinese shift of position is just a gesture, and that we may have conceded too much by the inflection of language on Tibet. But we need to remember that both countries have come a long way during the 15 years since Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi made his historic visit to China,

which has triggered a new paradigm in bilateral relations. Both countries had systematically followed up on the process since then and not allowed any specific points of divergence in style or substance to disrupt it.

China and India need a sustained period of peace to focus on their socio-economic development. As they keep working together on a range of issues, they are also acquiring a new respect for each other. What is more, they are beginning to recognise the convergences and divergences in their national interests; and that the former far outweigh and outnumber the latter. Taken to its logical conclusion, the Sikkim issue should open up new opportunities in future. For example, China had built the Karakoram highway from its Sinkiang province through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir to Islamabad in territory that its own treaty of 1963 with Pakistan recognised as disputed. The Sino-Indian frontier in J&K has, of course, to be settled between the two Asian giants. Demarcation of the Line of Actual Control is critical to future peace and stability, and must be expedited. Meanwhile, a trading post at undisputed points like the Karakoram Pass in Ladakh would be another way of working for the future on the basis of current reality in a way that does not impact negatively on the national interest of either country.

Centre to renew NSCN(K) ceasefire

BHAVNA VIJ-AURORA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

HOPEFUL of achieving peace in strife-torn Nagaland, the Centre has decided to renew the ceasefire with the NSCN (Khaplang) faction.

Renewed annually, the three-year-old ceasefire between NSCN (K) and the Centre was to expire on Wednesday. The ceasefire now will be extended for another year.

The Government has a separate ceasefire agreement with the other NSCN faction led by Isaak Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah.

A NSCN (K) delegation, including their representatives in the Ceasefire Monitoring Board



The Centre has a separate ceasefire agreement with the NSCN factions led by Swu and Muivah. A delegation of the Khaplang group was in Delhi to seek extension of the truce deal

hoping to engage the Khaplang faction in the process.

"However, it is still a little too early to have a full-fledged dialogue with the Khaplang representatives. Their organisation is in disarray at present, with their chief Khaplang himself in Myanmar. They are facing a leadership crisis. As of now, they have nobody who can enter into a dialogue with the Centre," an official explained.

In fact, sources added that even the supervisor of the CMB, C. Sinsong Kuki, was not a Naga and originally hailed from Manipur. Kuki was part of the delegation which met the Home Ministry officials.

Laying all speculation to rest — that their armed wing did not

favour extending the ceasefire — Kuki made it clear that it was in everybody's interest.

However, a reconciliation between the two NSCN factions — as being attempted by some Naga tribal organisations — did not appear likely. Kuki complained to the Home Ministry that the security forces were ineffective in containing NSCN (I-M) ceasefire violators. The I-M cadre, he alleged, were moving freely with arms and killing innocent civilians.

Sources said that the Khaplang faction was losing quite a few of its cadre to the I-M. "There are several Khaplang deserters, and most of them are joining the I-M, which is still going strong," the official added.

reciprocate their gesture by agreeing to the extension. "The bilateral ceasefire is in mutual interest. It will give a boost to the Government's efforts to reach a final and permanent settlement to the Naga problem," he added.

Sources said that with the Centre's dialogue with NSCN (I-M) currently at an impasse, it was

(CMB), was in the Capital for talks with Home Ministry officials. Sources said the NSCN (K) members expressed their eagerness to extend the ceasefire, in the interest of the Naga people. "They see it as a step forward to retain peace and stability in the region," disclosed a senior official.

The Government planned to

Tripura rebels give up arms, ready for peace

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Agartala: In a major breakthrough, two underground rebel outfits of Tripura, NLFT (Biswamohan) and NLFT (Nayanbashi), agreed to end decades-old insurgency in the state.

Senior rebel commanders, including the Nayanbashi faction chief, Nayanbashi Jamaatia, called on deputy Prime



Minister L K Advani separately on Thursday and assured him of "suspend-

ing all hostilities and violent movements" from Thursday.

While two rebel commanders and one "advisor" accompanied Nayanbashi, the four-member NLFT (Biswamohan) faction was led by its senior leaders Benoy Debbarma and Mantu Koloy. The announcement is viewed as first step to en masse surrender of the underground rebels.

Earlier, a memorandum was signed between the NLFT (Nayanbashi) faction and senior officials of the central and state government in New Delhi. While joint secretary,

North East, Rajiv Agarwal represented the central government, Tripura Tribal welfare commissioner GSG Ayengar signed the memorandum for the state government.

Additional secretary to the Union government K P Singh chaired the meetings. DGP Tripura GM Srivastava, who played a key role in the peace process, was also present during the meetings.

The NLFT (Biswamohan) faction submitted a 10-point charter of demands to the central government. All the top guns of the militant outfits had been camping in New Delhi for one month.

DGP Srivastava told TNN from New Delhi over telephone that the Nayanbashi faction would be confined to a camp and refrain from violent activities. They would also not be allowed to move around with firearms. Discussions on surrender would take place during this period.

Sources said insurgents, including the top brass, would surrender en masse to Tripura Governor Dinesh Nandan Sahaya.

Observers, however, said the surrender would not mean an end to insurgency in the militancy-beleaguered state as several other militant outfits will step up their operations. Moreover, both the NLFT factions had suffered splits over the peace accord.

Arms haul in Bangladesh

FOR nearly five hours in the dead of night of 1 April, some 30-40 labourers worked furiously, unloading heavy boxes and material from two trawlers at a Bangladesh government jetty in Chittagong. The OC of the local *thana* was present at the Chittagong Urea Fertilizer Limited jetty, supervising the work with three other policemen. An innocuous enough sight perhaps but the boxes contained thousands of automatic weapons, including some one million rounds of ammunition, 150 rocket grenade launchers and 25,000 hand grenades. There was enough to fill 10 truckloads and to equip a small, modern army and when eventually laid out at the local police ground resembled "a huge armoury."

A local marine security official remonstrated with the OC who told him to keep quiet. The officer reported the operation to his boss at the port who in turn informed the Chittagong Metro Police. The police charged out with some 200 men, it is reported, and stopped the weapons shipment.

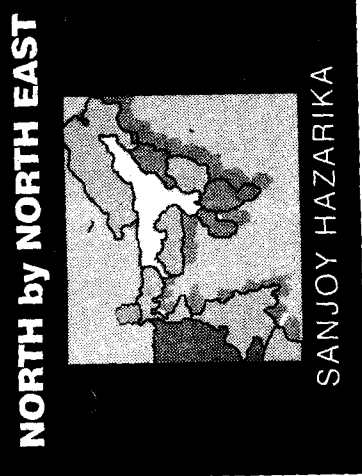
Reporters from the local media, including the *Daily Star* of Dhaka, the most respected and widely circulated English daily of the country, wrote graphic descriptions of the event including the running of the operation by two young men with mobiles. The men and labourers vanished at the sight of the police. The OC is now the principal investigator, much to the despair of local worried residents.

A Bangladeshi minister rushed to the site of the haul, which is the latest of several in the past years. The others were much smaller and meant for groups like Ulfa. The official Bangladeshi reaction is that this shipment was meant for its increasingly powerful criminal gangs as well as fundamentalist groups. The Indians say it was meant for the North-east armed groups.

But it probably is a mix of several factors: weapons for the North-east, for local gangs in Bangladesh and also for those in need of small and medium-size arms in the region, such as in other parts of India and even Nepal. Bangladesh is turning into a gun merchant's paradise, with official complicity at local and even higher levels. It is inconceivable that any North-east group has the funds or capacity to spare some Rs 200-Rs 300 crore, which is what this haul is worth at the minimum. They're saving funds raised from extortion and other rackets for the future, not to spend it in one splurge.

But where did the vessels come from? Who owns them? Why did they land at the government jetty? On whose behalf was the police officer functioning? Who paid for the weapons and where were they headed? Why were the labourers and crew of the ships allowed to escape?

Bangladesh must give clear and unequivocal answers to these questions. Otherwise it will be seen as both a destination for international arms smugglers and complicit in efforts to destabilise the region. It is not just a question of a few rebels here or there, hiding in safe houses or rooms which New Delhi calls "camps". It is the development of a



network which threatens the very stability and security of Bangladesh itself and its neighbours. The Bangladeshi media must play a role in exposing this nexus, which may have elements of official connivance plus the involvement of the ubiquitous ISI.



Bangladesh home affairs minister Lutfozaman Babor displays a rocket launcher from among the arms cache seized in Chittagong on 1 April. — AFP

Hokishe Sema's stand

IN a powerful denunciation of the current cease-fire process in Nagaland, former chief minister Hokishe Sema, who is the state chief of the Bharatiya Janata Party, has attacked the current state leadership for its failure to move the negotiations between New Delhi and the NSCN (I-M) forward. In addition, he has boldly called for a realistic solution which does not "disintegrate other communities and cause turmoil in the region" and warned of a dangerous deadlock in the negotiations.

Sema has complicated the discussions with a proposal for more than one Naga state — meaning that Nagas living

outside of Nagaland should be allowed to form their own little Nagalands. This flies in the very face of Naga declarations for integration and he says that the concept of sovereignty is relative.

Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, which are strongly opposed to the Naga concept of integration which would take away large chunks of their territory (since it falls, in the Naga lexicon, in "traditional Naga areas") have found an unexpected ally.

Sema's controversial statement, which has been missed in the metro media and includes a veiled attack on the NSCN, came in the middle of a discussion in the Nagaland Assembly and embarrassed both chief minister Neiphiu Rio and the NSCN. Both reacted predictably: the first by securing a statement of support from all constituents of the Democratic Alliance of Nagaland which governs the state and which distanced itself from the statement and said it reflected Sema's personal views. The NSCN went on the offensive and slammed the remarks, point by point.

After a few days of quiet, Sema again caused turmoil by issuing the two-page statement to the media in Nagaland and saying that he stood by his remarks. This is not a man who is going to be bullied in changing his convictions. He met the NSCN leadership in Bangkok a couple of years back where he urged them to accept the reality of Nagaland within India and use the opportunities offered by the Constitution.

His statement is well thought through and bears the mark of a good draftsman. It is significant because not only is Sema the (nominal?) boss of Atal Behari Vajpayee's party in this border state but also the convenor of the peace committee set up by the state government to bring the warring Naga factions together.

But does it have anything to do with the animosity between the Khaplang group of the NSCN and the Muivah faction after the former's recent cease-fire overtures were rebuffed? Nothing can be ruled out in Nagaland where politics is mixed up in tribal feuds, concepts of moral rightness, funds and of loyalty to rival fighting factions.

Sema has raised serious questions about the peace process and the content of the negotiations. This is significant because it comes in the middle of the campaign for the Lok Sabha elections.

There is another important aspect here: what Sema has expressed is extremely realistic and pragmatic and comes from a former Congressman who has been in politics for nearly 50 years. His views, born of experience, appear unpalatable to those groups which believe that they are the true arbiters of Naga destiny. But democracy is all about accommodating different points of view and doing so through a process of transparency. A lack of tolerance for other viewpoints as seen in the opposition earlier to the Reconciliation Commission and unpreparedness to listen reflects an undemocratic attitude and does not bode well for the future.

Kuki ultras kill 29 Karbis in Assam

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, March 24. — Suspected Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) extremists killed at least 29 Karbi villagers, injuring eight others in separate incidents of violence in Karbi Anglong hill district of Assam today.

Police sources here said Kuki ultras swooped down on two Karbi villages in the Bokajan police station area in the wee hours and killed 16 villagers and injured two. Four of them were hacked to death while the rest were gunned down by the marauding ultras.

In another incident, Kuki militants fired indiscriminately at a Karbi village in the Diphu police station area around 1.30 this afternoon and killed 10 Karbi villag-

ers on the spot. Several other persons were injured in the attack. Senior police officers from the capital rushed to the district on hearing the news.

Chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi will visit the violence-hit district tomorrow to take stock of the situation. Police sources here said the death toll could go up.

Today's attacks may trigger another round of ethnic clashes in the militancy-affected remote hill district as Karbi ultras belonging to the United People's Democratic Solidarity are feared to retaliate.

Bandh called: The Autonomous State Demand Committee has called for a dawn-to-dusk Karbi Anglong bandh tomorrow in protest against the killing, PTI adds. While demanding a probe into the massacre, the ASDC said the "inhuman" killing must be condemned at all levels.

THE STATESMAN

25 MAR 2004

Honest Indian?

Between Centre and N-E, a tall order

Successive Delhi governments have held insurgency responsible for lack of development in the North-east whereas the real reason is lack of will. Infrastructure like bridges, inter-state roads and hydel projects were promoted by the North Eastern Council during insurgency. It did a commendable job until the late 1980s when the Planning Commission began scaling down annual allocation. Several schemes were jettisoned. This year too allocation was slashed by 20 per cent, contrary to the NDA's talk of rapid development. Just how Delhi treats the region is clear from the withdrawal in 2000 of excise exemption to tobacco. In response to Congress' New Industrial Policy in 1991, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Tripura received 10 industrial entrepreneur memorandum applications but until March 1998 not a single proposal was implemented. Deve Gowda announced a Rs 6,100-crore economic package, including the creation of a non-lapsable pool of Rs 1,500 crore raised from different Central ministries. There would have been no funds crunch. The NDA announced major economic benefits, "extra care" and a "new approach" towards the region, but the lower strata is as far removed from uplift as ever. The setting up of a ministry of development of the north-eastern region in 2001 raised hopes, but it too is bogged down in bureaucratic quagmire.

Given north-east realities, it would benefit government to open trade with Bangladesh, Myanmar and Tibet and encourage a trans-border economy. Apart from deriving social gains for poor border villagers, it will discourage smuggling. Trade with Myanmar through Moreh was legalised in 1995. Mizoram can exchange goods through Champai. It would be possible to reverse Tripura's sense of isolation if Bangladesh allows transit facilities. Prospects have brightened with the introduction of the Agartala-Dhaka bus service. Arunachal Pradesh can open a route through the abandoned Ledo-Myanmar-China Sillwell Road. The "Look East" policy and the Prime Minister's comment supports the north-east becoming an economic bridgehead to south-east Asia. But what odds honesty over political gimmickry?

Tribals renew demand for autonomy

N S M
Indian News Service

DISPUR, March 5. —
As the Lok Sabha polls
round the corner, tribal
groups in Assam are out to
capitalise on the opportu-
nity to pressurise the
mainstream political par-
ties to highlight their de-
mand for autonomy under
the Central Act.

Three tribal groups,
namely Mising, Tiwa-La-
long and Rabha-Hasong
have raised demands for
more autonomy in the
wake of constitution of the
Bodoland Territorial Au-
tonomous District Council
for Bodo tribe under the
provisions of Amended
Sixth Schedule of the Con-
stitution.

The Bodoland Territorial
Autonomous District
Council was formed on 8
December last as per a
Central Act as per the
Bodoland Territorial
Council Accord signed in
February last year among
Bodo Liberation Tiger,
Central Government and
Assam Government.

Creation of the territorial
council for Bodos has
spurred these tribal groups
to raise demand for up-
gradation of their existing
interim autonomous coun-
cils which were formed in
1990s under provisions of
State Acts.

These groups believe
the BTADC, constituted
under a Central Act, it is
far better equipped to
serve the Bodo community
compared to the limited

power endowed upon
their respective interim
autonomous councils.
Now, with elections
knocking at the door these
groups are pressurising
political parties including
the ruling Congress, re-
gional Asom Gana Parish-
ad and the Bharatiya Jana-
ta Party to extend support
to their demand for more
autonomy.

Under pressure, the
AGP leadership has al-
ready taken a stand that
welfare of the indigenous
communities in the state
will top its agenda while
the ruling Congress is try-
ing to placate these groups
by assuring them to take
up the issue with the Cen-
tral government in the
right earnest after the
polls.

During the latest meet-
ing with the representa-
tives of these three tribal
groups a couple of days
back, chief minister Tarun
Gogoi told them that his
government had already
apprised the central gov-
ernment of their demand
for autonomy under the
amended Sixth Schedule.
The tribal communities
were told that state gov-
ernment had been incapa-
citated by the polls to pur-
sue the matter with the
Centre at the moment.
However, they were assur-
ed of a positive forwarding
note from the state cabinet
sub-committee regarding
their autonomy demand to
the central government
"once the elections are
over".

Jaswant assures N-E of funds

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Feb. 27. — Even as the north-eastern states cry foul over the NDA government pruning the budgetary allocation for the North Eastern Council (NEC) and limiting it to about Rs 395 crore for the current fiscal, finance minister Mr Jaswant Singh has tried to allay the fear of fund shortage.

During his two-day visit to Assam, Mr Singh assured the people that notwithstanding the drastic cut in the budgetary allocation to the NEC, the nodal development agency of the region, funds would not be a problem for the North-east.

The finance minister came here yesterday to deliver a lecture on the BJP's "India Shining" propaganda in the city. The lecture was organised by the state BJP unit as part of its poll campaign.

Although Mr Singh explained why the country was in a better state compared to what it was six years ago, he was hard put to answer why the backward North-east should also feel good along with the rest of the country.

After the lecture, the minister, while interacting with the media, stated that though the Centre had to slash the allocation to the NEC because of certain "intricacies" involved in the process, there would



Mr Jaswant Singh poses with the 'Lachit Machal', handed over by a BJP worker, in Guwahati on Friday. — Eastern Projections

be no dearth of funds for the developmental projects in the region.

"The failure of the NDA government to make adequate budgetary allocation to the region should not be viewed with disappointment. The Centre will not fail to ensure funds for development projects in the region," he assured, saying he was aware that the Congress was making drastic cuts in allocation to the NEC, a major poll plank against the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls.

Besides gracing the

"bhoomipujan" for a portion of the East-West Corridor project yesterday, Mr Singh today inaugurated a youth development centre in the city, which is being set up by an organisation sponsored by the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP).

In a bid to woo youths before the polls, Mr Singh, while inaugurating the centre, promised help in building a hostel for students from the North-east in Delhi. He asked for a project proposal at the earliest.

Gogoi demands white paper on Central funds for North-East

By Sushanta Talukdar

GUWAHATI, FEB. 24. The Assam Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, today demanded that the Central Government publish a white paper on the allocation of funds to the northeastern States and their use by various Ministries during the last five years under the Non-lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR).

Addressing a press conference here, Mr. Gogoi said the white paper should reflect what share of Central funds was given to Assam and the other northeastern States compared to States such as Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Ridiculing the "India shining" propaganda of the BJP-led NDA Government, Mr. Gogoi said that while only 17 km of the East-West corridor was built during the last five years, the Centre had issued big newspaper advertisements about the Rs. 5,600-crore project to build a 1400-km long road.

"It took five years to complete only 17 km of the proposed 1400 km road and the BJP-led Government is still claiming that India is shining. This shows that the much-hyped propaganda of India shining is nothing but a

hollow election slogan," Mr. Gogoi said.

The Chief Minister alleged that the NDA Government had deprived Assam and other northeastern States of their due allocation of Central funds. The reduction of allocation for the North Eastern Council (NEC) and the Human Resource Development Ministry's move to seek exemption from mandatory budgetary allocation to these States were "glaring examples of such injustice."

Accusing the Opposition Asom Gana Parishad of indulging in "secret love affairs" with the BJP, Mr. Gogoi alleged that the regional party has been keeping mum despite "such injustice" to the region by the BJP-led NDA Government.

He alleged that the "AGP has been busy negotiating with the Nagaland Chief Minister, Neiphiu Rio, on a possible poll tie-up with the BJP-backed North East People's Forum (NEPF) despite Mr. Rio demanding the creation of a greater Nagaland that includes Assam's territory. "Let Mr. Rio make it clear that he would not demand Assam's territory for inclusion in the greater Nagaland," Mr. Gogoi insisted.

Turning down Mr. Rio's proposal for an "out-of-court settlement" of the Assam-Nagaland border dispute, Mr. Gogoi said: "Let the Supreme Court decide as to which State the disputed land should belong." The Assam Government would urge the Centre to prevail upon the Nagaland Government to maintain the "status quo" as regards the disputed area, he said.

Mr. Gogoi alleged that the Nagaland Government had been making attempts to encroach upon the disputed site near Merapani along the Assam-Nagaland border.

Bengali actress dead

KOLKATA, FEB. 24. Actress Subrata Chatterjee, who has appeared in over 100 films and a dozen plays, died at a Government hospital here after suffering from a protracted illness. Subrata, 62, is survived by a daughter. Her husband, Tarun Kumar, brother of the late Uttam Kumar, died a few months ago. Subrata, who shot to fame playing an important role in "Pushpadhanu" in 1959, made her debut in the film "Ladies' Seat" in 1954. — PTI

MUDDY WATERS

Why Peace Is A Tall Order In N-E

By JB LAMA

Among the huge gathering which heard out the Prime Minister during his maiden visit to Kohima last October were hundreds of Nagas from Manipur's hill districts. Some of them had been provided transport by the Nagaland government from the Mao border checkpoint while others who missed out trekked the 32 km to the Nagaland capital. The air was heavy with the expectancy that Atal Behari Vajpayee would qualifiedly endorse the reality of the Naga demand for the integration of their contiguous areas in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. But he minced no words about such a sensitive issue requiring a political consensus and that as far as the Centre was concerned it was a closed chapter "at least for now". No thunderous applause followed and the Nagas from Manipur returned home disappointed. But the Prime Minister's neutral stand drew a sigh of relief from Manipur (where schools and colleges were reportedly shut down for fear of violent reaction).

Belated reaction

The Amsterdam-based Naga International Support Centre, though, was quick to react. It expressed surprise, questioned Delhi's sincerity in taking the ongoing dialogue to its logical conclusion and wondered whether the Centre was "aware of the sensitivity of the issue".

Curiously and somewhat surprisingly, NSCN-IM general-secretary Thuingaleng Muivah's reaction followed exactly a month later, indicating that he was taken aback since he had not expected the Prime Minister, after having acknowledged the reality of the Naga demand, to have made such a negative remark. He said Vajpayee's approach remained "highly questionable and unacceptable" to him and his outfit, adding that "the insistence on consensus of other peoples to determine the future of Nagas is absolutely irrelevant; rather an attempt at shifting responsibility to switch the ongoing process off the track".

The "other peoples" was obviously a reference to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur, parts of which the Nagas have laid claim to. Muivah does not think it necessary to have their opinions on what he calls a Naga homeland, arguing that "they had been living in their own and not in anyone's territory". More to the point, though, would the collective leadership be so kind as to explain the "original" quotient of the Naga homeland?

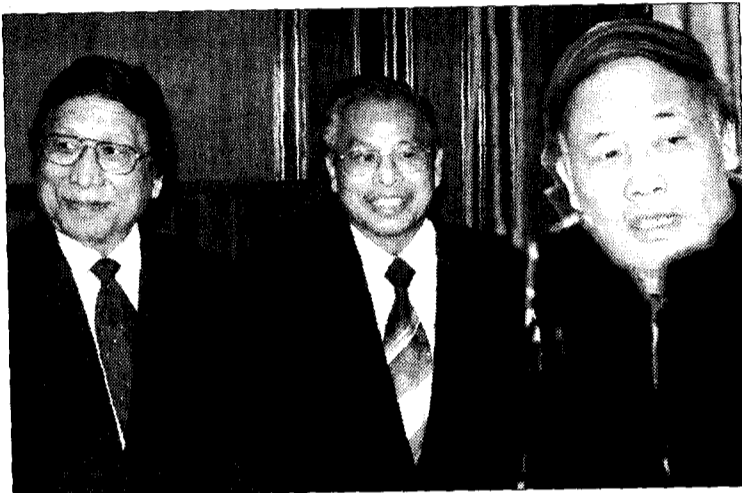
The January 2003 peace talks

The writer, on The Statesman's staff for more than four decades, specialises in North-east affairs.

in Delhi discussed "substantive issues" but nothing concrete emerged after Naga leaders stuck to their demand for the inclusion of a single administrative unit in the agenda for the second round. It was only at last December's meeting in Bangkok that Indian special emissary K Padmanabhaiah managed to break the ice. But Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga, who has the Centre's authority to act as facilitator and met Muivah and NSCN-IM chairman Isak Swu in

likely to welcome any decision in favour of the Nagas.

Integration is not a new concept, having been incorporated in the 1947 Nine-point agreement and also in the 1960 accord with the apolitical Naga People's Convention. The underground refuses to accept the 1960 accord which ultimately led to the formation of Nagaland. Besides, if there is to be any change in territorial features, this must be with the consent of all involved. And since such a sensitive issue



Bangkok this month, said that "if it were not for me, they would never speak to the government of India". Which would imply that the two leaders were seriously thinking of pulling out of the peace process. This would have violated their earlier agreement about finding a solution, come what may.

Then as if to cover up why the collective leadership had agreed to come despite being so critical of the Prime Minister's Kohima remark, NSCN-IM steering committee member Rh Raising explained that "there have been talks about integration in some sections of the press, maybe the Prime Minister was misquoted". But if there had been any doubt on this score, the NSCN-IM could just as easily have sought verification from the PMO.

Suits both

The second round of talks with Central leaders was to resume this month but will now be held only after the Lok Sabha elections. This will suit both sides. Perhaps the NDA government wanted just that, confident of coming back to power with a majority so as to push through Parliament any agreement likely to be reached with the NSCN-IM. Vajpayee has already said he is prepared to amend the Constitution to meet Naga aspirations.

Ill omens these, for simmering tensions between Nagaland and Manipur over the explosive issue are bound to return when the subject comes up for discussion. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and particularly Manipur are un-

cannot be consigned to the dustbin forever, the basis for a settlement must be found to preserve peace and harmony between the states. After all, no single state can prosper without the cooperation of others.

But what is of greater concern now is the strained relationship and growing conflict between the NSCN-IM and the Manipur government. Restraint is of the essence in view of some recent disturbing events. Manipur's Okram Ibobi Singh had his first brush with the outfit within days of assuming office in March 2002 when 11 NSCN-IM cadres were killed in an encounter with the Manipur police near Pallel in Chandel district, bordering Myanmar. Some weeks later, the underground retaliated by abducting the Chandel deputy commissioner, a Manipuri, who was released unharmed a few days later, but not until the Centre intervened.

Then followed the arrest and subsequent release last year of more than a dozen NSCN-IM men and a senior functionary who were on their way to Tamenglong to attend what they described as a meeting to create political awareness among villagers in view of Padmanabhaiah's suggestion to "redraw" Manipur's map with its two hill districts of Senapati and Ukhrul excluded.

It would seem their mission was designed to convey the message to the Manipuris that the hills belonged to them and that, like it or not, the Nagaland ceasefire was very much in vogue in the districts they inhabited.

Last November's killing of

Elizabeth Lungnila, a minister's eight-year-old daughter, after being kidnapped from school has sparked a nasty reaction from the NSCN-IM. Following a widespread public outcry, the Manipur police arrested over a dozen suspects, most of whom were freed on bail. When the police pleaded helplessness to go ahead with the case for lack of evidence and suggested that it be handed over to the CBI, the government is supposed to have done so most reluctantly.

Lungrila case

Last month, the NSCN-IM claimed to have arrested from Dimapur the "prime suspect" who belongs to a community it has been at loggerheads with in Manipur since the early 1990s. He is said to have confessed that the Manipur Assembly Speaker and two Ibobi ministers (also from the same community) sent him to Nagaland. In an ultimatum served on the three legislators, the NSCN-IM has given them a month's time to explain their respective "positions".

But why should an underground outfit from another state that sincerely observes the ceasefire meddle in Manipur affairs? To highlight its claim of fighting injustice, could it not have handed the "suspect" over to Manipur? Interestingly, all this came about after the NSCN-IM made known it was "severely punishing" the three tribals (from Maram in Senapati) who "murdered" a Manipuri driver in December on the Imphal-Dimapur highway.

Implicit in this is the message that if found guilty the three legislators must also be handed exemplary punishment. Ibobi smells a rat and believes it involves the Opposition's "frustrated reaction" to its failing to "buy" the Speaker with Naga underground support.

He also alleges that the NSCN-IM had repeatedly tried to influence the three legislators to withdraw support to his Congress-led coalition government. The NSCN-IM has not spelled out a political agenda in the event of a settlement. But for the moment, all one can visualise is a Nagaland crawling with armed cadres breathing down the neck of dissent.

The reconciliation process has failed to make any headway and perhaps it never will. Fratricidal killings show no sign of abatement. SS Khaplang's breakaway NSCN faction and the Naga National Council will not take kindly to being left out of the picture and any decision arrived at it would have to satisfy both the underground and overground. A tall order in troubled times that would suggest hoping for the best while preparing for the worst.

Pride prejudiced

✓ Tripura must spike slave trade ^{5.6 19/2} _{8.11.82}

If Tripura was declared “disturbed” in February 1997 to contain the growing insurgency, far more disturbing is the report of militants shanghaiing poor villagers — men and women — from remote areas to slave in fields and granaries owned by rebel organisations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This apparently has been going on for some years but comes as little surprise in a state where the government’s writ does not extend to large stretches of tribal land. Unchecked infiltration from across the border and the seemingly unending rebel activity since the 1980s have bequeathed a shattered economy. In the 1990s there were reports of abject penury forcing many tribal families to leave their homes and forage far afoot. Ironically, Tripura is credited with being the only state in the North-east to have earnestly implemented rural development programmes. But because of illiteracy and poverty, poor tribals fall easy prey to unscrupulous local agents who possibly enjoy an excellent liaison with their counterparts across the border. Since it is almost impossible for the Border Security Force to keep a check on such activities, the task should be entrusted to the Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council.

However, a permanent solution lies in the rapid development of rural areas where even the basic amenities are lacking. The idea of regrouping hill villages for rehabilitation by allotting each family an acre and a house — a scheme which the Left Front has approved — seems relevant in the present context. Since security will be provided there will be no disruption of children’s education and development activities. This method succeeded in Mizoram at a time when insurgency was at its height in the 1970s. But to achieve the desired objectives, the Tripura Marxists must be serious and sincere.

STATEMENT

19 FEB 2004

Unholy alliance

51-6
141
2.10.04
BJP breaking ground in North-east

The NDA is all set to conquer the North-east thanks to former Congress stalwarts Gegong Apang and Purno Sangma who, feeding off their hatred for Sonia Gandhi's influence, have thrown their lot in with the BJP. With Nagaland won over, the latest to join the bandwagon is Zoramthanga's Mizo National Front. And work continues apace to pull down the Congress coalitions in Manipur and Meghalaya. Winning is all that matters and national parties are not averse to joining hands with smaller tribal groups towards this end. In 1988, the Congress tied up with the Tripura Upajati Yuba Samity and came to power. But if the report of the Indigenous National Party of Tripura — the political wing of the outlawed National Liberation Front of Tripura that is largely responsible for the killing of non-tribals — joining the NDA is true, then something is amiss because the party in power at the Centre has never been known to broker such alliances. Comprising the Tripura National Volunteer (of Bijoy Hrangkhawl), TUJS and the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, the INTP managed just one seat in the last assembly elections. It was allegedly involved in sending students to Bangladesh for training in camps run by the NLFT. In the last elections the Congress shared seats with it.

Zoramthanga is said have persuaded old friend Hrangkhawl to side with the NDA. Interestingly, until recently the BJP had been demanding Hrangkhawl's arrest because of his "links with militants". More than the NDA, the INTP stands to gain, because it is convinced that the BJP's "feel-good" tonic will help revitalise it to achieve its goals of an autonomous state and the reservation of 80 per cent assembly seats for tribals. Being in league with rebel-friendly groups would seem to quantify the saying about laws being dumb in the midst of arms.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 FEB 2004

Dirty dynamics

9-15-02
Ibobi blows whistle on NSCN 51-6

When it comes to toppling governments, Manipur perhaps the most dynamic state in the North-east of Meghalaya. For which reason chief minister Okram Ib Singh must thank his lucky stars for continuing to occupy the hot seat since March 2002. Though his Congress-led Secular Progressive Front government enjoys a comfortable majority, he always seems to be on tenterhooks. But Ibobi is no less adept at robbing Peter to pay Paul. In his dogged determination to run a purely Congress ministry, he has increased the party's tally from 20 to 31 in a house of 60 by arranging MLAs from smaller groups. The problem is that many of his own legislators are unhappy with his leadership to a point the Opposition is trying to cash in on. He recently forced over a dozen of his ministers to spend some weeks in a Kolkata hotel to insulate them from the Opposition.

However, the threat to Ibobi's authority may not come from outside but within if he continues to hold on to the important finance and home portfolios and remains chief of the state Congress unit. He must dexterously handle the 10 hill members who have signed the United Naga Council and All Naga Association, Manipur's 2002 Senapati declaration supporting the extension of the Nagaland ceasefire to the state. No wonder the NSCN-IM is fishing in troubled waters, the murder last November of the eight-year-old daughter of a minister after she was kidnapped from her school being a handy lure. The outfit claims to have "arrested", from Dimapur, the prime suspect who is said to have named the Manipur Assembly speaker and two of Ibobi's ministers. Ibobi senses a political undertone in the NSCN-IM ultimatum served on the three legislators "to clarify" their position within a month. The rebel outfit has played no insignificant role in pulling down the Congress government in Arunachal Pradesh by remote control. If a rebel organisation is allowed to ride a high horse, the future of democracy is doomed.

THE STATESMAN 12 FEB 2002

Flawed formulae

Why ominous signs loom in N-E

Delhi's choice of Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga to facilitate the Naga peace process is commendable. But its entrusting an active political leader like Purno Sangma to broker peace with the militants of the state he belongs to does seem unreasonable because this is bound to afford him enormous leverage. Sangma last year covered himself in controversy by claiming the Centre had authorised him to contact militant Garo Achik National Volunteer Council leaders. Came the Centre's denial and he retorted by saying that perhaps Delhi felt it unnecessary to consult the state government. Zoramthanga is a different kettle of fish. Having been Laldenga's deputy who played a significant role in the signing of the 1986 Mizo Peace Accord, he is ideally suited for the job because of his manipulative ability to sort out differences between the Centre and NSCN leaders. It is not clear which six militant leaders Zoramthanga met in Bangkok recently, but the Centre should have been a little forthcoming if it had given him leave to do so.

There is no denying the NDA's sincerity in pursuing the peace process. But if progress has been painfully slow, the BJP has benefited in that it was able to send seven members to the Nagaland assembly, courtesy the NSCN-IM. The toppling of the majority Congress government in Arunachal Pradesh could not have been possible without the rebels' support. All this because the Centre lacks a consistent policy on insurgency. There is little to crow about its accord with the militant Bodo Liberation Tigers that resulted in the formation of a territorial council under the Sixth Schedule. The region will know peace only when the rival National Democratic Front of Bodoland realises the futility of its struggle for an independent state and the new administrators keep their promise to protect the interests of the non-Bodo majority. The Centre would do well to watch Assam, Manipur and Tripura. Ethnic tensions threaten peace there as much as insurgency does.

THE STATESMAN 11 FEB 2004

Shrinking sanctuary

9/2/00
Time to talk Ulfa down 5/2/00

It is too early to determine whether the Bhutan crackdown has destroyed Ulfa and Bodo militants' fighting capability because even after Operation Rhino they reorganised themselves pretty fast, the Army action providing them impetus to set up camps in Bhutan and arming themselves to the teeth. The Ulfa military wing alone had a strength of 3,000, some 400 of whom had been trained by Kachin guerrillas in Upper Myanmar. Its civil wing, comprising 12,000, provided an organisational network. After declaring a unilateral ceasefire in 1991, more than 50 per cent of their striking force refused to surrender, even if a large number of them threw in the towel at the army's instance when the Asom Gana Parishad was in power. The exact number of casualties in Bhutan is not known. Besides, the quantity of weapons seized from 30 militant camps was not that satisfying. All this would seem to suggest the militants' striking capability has only been blunted. About 400 of them are said to have surrendered taking advantage of Dispur's latest offer of general amnesty the deadline for which has been further extended.

If the seemingly endless problem is to be resolved with any finality, waiting for the prodigals to return would be pointless. Perhaps it makes sense to broker a ceasefire and start a dialogue. If Delhi could take such a bold and imaginative initiative in Nagaland, why not in Assam? After all, the Ulfa is no less a potent force than the NSCN. With China refusing to shelter them, Bangladesh is the last convenient sanctuary. But of late even the Bangladeshis, particularly along the border, are reportedly wary of their presence and extortionist ways and want them gone. The tide seems to be slowly turning against the militants.

THE STATESMAN

10 FEB 2000

Stand & be counted

9-11-04 51-6 572
Time N-E MPs earned their feed

The North-east has no place left to go but up if the BJP takes the region's development seriously. For far too long while the Congress enjoyed a majority on its own, the eight states of the region (Sikkim included), comprising a population of some 46 million, had been poorly served by a mere 25 MPs who had done little or nothing to influence the making and unmaking of governments at the Centre. Now with coalition politics coming to stay, the MPs would do well to stand up and be counted. At least Purno Sangma, chief of the rival Nationalist Congress Party group, recognises the need for a cohesive team on the lines of Chandrababu Naidu's influential 11 members and Mamata Banerjee's seven.

This, however, seems somewhat unrealistic because the 25 MPs do not belong to any particular party and they are usually a silent lot. Not only are they known to have not expressed their views during debates on important national issues, none of them have cared to utilise the floor of the house to voice the problems of their respective states. For them, the badges of office as represented by comfortable official residences in the Capital are the ends, not the means.

Even at the height of the ethnic Naga-Kuki clashes in Manipur in the 1990s that claimed more than 1,500 lives, the tribal MP from the Outer Manipur constituency thought it unnecessary to spend some time in the state. With the BJP wave sweeping some North-east states, the ensuing elections are expected to throw up some surprises, particularly in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland which have received substantial Central largesse and are in the throes of that feel-good spirit. The BJP already has a foothold in these states, thanks to the alleged clandestine support of a Naga rebel group. The non-Congress Mizoram and Sikkim governments are NDA-friendly. While Assam is under the Congress, Meghalaya and Manipur have Congress-led coalitions.

Contrary to Sangma's optimism about his party making its presence felt in Assam, which sends the largest contingent of 14, he is not expected to do well given the fact that in the panchayat and municipal elections even the dominant Asom Gana Parishad was relegated to a poor third place behind the BJP. If Manipur's separatist Kanglei Yawal Kanna Lup sticks to its guns about not allowing the BJP to function, it will be a serious blow to the democratic process. The rebel outfit's warning, however, is not aimed so much at the party as its state unit chief, Th Chaoba Singh, a sitting MP, whom they consider the Centre's "agent" and want removed by 15 February.

It will be a sad commentary on democracy if rebel groups are allowed to swing the balance of power in favour of any particular party. Nothing could be more ominous and cynical than the reported Central offer of money to the NSCN-IM for the maintenance of its designated camps in Nagaland. If such be the price for peace, cracking the whip has got to be the cheaper alternative.

Sanjiv Hazarika

The leaders of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim to New Delhi have postponed their visit for talks with Indian leaders because of the proposed general elections.

The decision means that crucial top-level political discussions between the Naga leaders, Th. Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu, and Prime Minister Aral Behari Vajpayee, Deputy Prime Minister Mr LK Advani and others — assuming the National Democratic Alliance is returned to power at the Centre — will be significantly delayed, by as much as four or five months.

Indian officials who are in touch with the Naga militant group and its leaders, said that the postponement has been agreed to by both sides "because

Naga talks: poll hitch for Muivah trip

they know that there cannot be major political decisions during a time of elections." However, a senior official of the NSCN (I-M) in Dimapur said today that he had seen news reports of the delay and had not heard anything directly either from Mr. Muivah or Mr. Swu, the general secretary and chairman respectively of the organisation, who live in Amsterdam, Bangkok and other parts of South-east Asia.

Mizoram Chief Minister Mr Zoramthanga, an occasional interlocutor between the Centre and the Nagas, is in Bangkok for talks with the NSCN (I-M) leaders. This follows on from last month's discussions between the Centre's Representative, Mr K Padmanabiah and his team, which included the Intelligence Bureau Director, Mr KP Singh. The earlier round of

talks had proved quite tough with Mr. Muivah insisting that the Centre had closed the door on a future settlement through the Prime Minister's visit to Nagaland last October where he spelt out the Centre's position on a number of issues.

The NSCN's main objection was to Mr. Vajpayee's remark that since there was no political consensus on the issue of changing state boundaries, a core demand of the NSCN which wants the formation of a Naga homeland comprising the current state of Nagaland and including parts of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam where some Nagas live, the boundaries could not be changed. The statement was welcomed by the other states of the region, which fiercely oppose the NSCN view, and the territorial

question is a highly emotional and sensitive issue in the North-east, showing fundamental differences in approaches over history and ethnicity. Later, however, the Naga leaders agreed to come to Delhi for discussions with Mr Vajpayee and others.

The NSCN position has created concern among Nagas who are not allied with the NSCN, even in Manipur, where its writ runs in the hills. A young Naga leader from the state emphasised to this writer during a recent visit to Imphal that the Naga movement had always been about "sovereignty" and not merely about "integration of lands".

The impact of the delay and the many rifts within the Naga community are difficult to detail in the short-term but the following is clear: one, the Naga group will try

and use the delay in its favour to further consolidate and strengthen its cadre, political and financial base since the Centre and state government will be more focused on the forthcoming elections. Another is that influential Naga NGOs and Church groups will all so get a chance to press their demands for better understanding and reconciliation among tribes and armed factions, irrespective of the political process.

"There must be a reality check on their (NSCN) demands and they should ask for something which is possible," said an official today, who is closely involved in the talks. "We know the government mind and it will not go beyond a particular point — that is why both sides have to be realistic and the Naga side is more realistic now than in the past."

Naga talks

BANGKOK, Feb. 4. — The Mizoram chief minister, Mr Zoramthanga, today met the NSCN (IM) general secretary, T Muivah, and said a dialogue would help in strengthening peace talks between the Government of India and the Naga outfit. "We had very good discussions and I hope that now things (the peace talks) will move in the right direction," Zoramthanga said after a closed door one-on-one talks between the two leaders. The Mizoram chief minister, who described himself as a "facilitator" between the Government and NSCN (IM), flew in here yesterday and is scheduled to leave on Friday. He said he may hold another round of talks with Muivah tomorrow. Nobody was available for comments from the Naga side. Asked if he had come to Bangkok with an agenda for the talks, Mr Zoramthanga said his role was to see if he could play any part in the smooth running of peace talks.

He said the NSCN (IM) had appraised him of the problems it faced regarding the peace process, which he would convey to the government. However, he refused to elaborate saying "these talks are secret nature". — PTI

পুরনোদের

দেশের উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চল মানেই সন্ত্রাসের স্তিকাগার। বছর যায়, জঙ্গিপন্যার অবসান হয় না। পুলিশি-সেনা অভিযান চলে, উন্নয়নের জন্য অর্থ ব্যয় হয়, কিন্তু সন্ত্রাসের অবসান হয় না। রাজনৈতিক নেতারা কখনও ক্ষমতা দখল করতেন, কখনও বা ক্ষমতায় টিকে থাকতে জঙ্গিদের মদত নেন, মদত দেন। বন্ধুবেশে প্রতীবেশী দেশ মদত জোগায় জঙ্গিদের। বিশ্বসেই হোক বা ভক্তিতে বা ভয়ে জঙ্গিদের মেনে চললে সাধারণ মানুষ। সব-মিলে সন্ত্রাসের জলে আবদ্ধ গাটা অঞ্চল। ভূটানের সেনা অভিযান ও পাশাপাশি আরও কয়েকটি ঘটনা কি সেই জাল ছিন্ন করতে পারবে? সেই সূত্রের সন্ধানেই এই প্রতিবেদন।

৭/১/০৪

অশোক সেনগুপ্ত ● গুম্বাহাতি ও প্রভাত ঘোষ ● আগরতলা

হাইলাকান্দি জেলার ধলাই চা-বাগানের আউটস্টেশনে কাজ করছিলেন সহকারী ম্যানেজার অশোক কুম্মি। গত ১৬ ডিসেম্বরের ঘটনা এটি। আচমকাই সশস্ত্র জঙ্গিরা এসে দাঁড়াল সামনে। বাধা দেওয়ার কোনও উপায় ছিল না। বাগান-কর্ডপুক খবর দিলেন কাটালিছেঁড়া ধানায়। যথারীতি কোনও কাজ হল না। এক মাস তাঁকে মিজোরামের ঘাঁটিতে অপহরণকারীরা আটকে রেখেছিল। মুক্তিপণ দিয়ে এই সেদিন ছাড়া পেলেন অশোকবাবু। এই কাতের নেপথ্যে ছিল 'ইউনাইটেড লিবারেশন ফ্রন্ট অব বরাকভ্যালি' নামে সদ্যসৃষ্ট একটি সংগঠনের কাভারেরা। অর্থাৎ এক দিকে বড় জঙ্গিগোষ্ঠীগুলিকে নিয়ন্ত্রণে

আনার চেষ্টা চলছে, অন্য দিকে গজিয়ে উঠছে নতুন নতুন জঙ্গিদল। 'বু' ন্যাশনাল কাউন্সিল অব ত্রিপুরা', 'বরোক ন্যাশনাল কাউন্সিল অব ত্রিপুরা'— একটু একটু করে খবর মিলছে নতুন নানা জঙ্গিগোষ্ঠীর। অসম-মণিপুরের সীমানায় 'জেমি রিভলিউশনারি আর্মি' (জেড আর এ) জঙ্গিরাও তাড়ব শুরু করেছে বলে স্থানীয় সূত্রের খবর। কাছাড়, উত্তর কাছাড় পার্বত্য অঞ্চল, মণিপুর, নাগাল্যান্ডের সীমানায় মূলত রঙমহি, জেমি এবং লিয়াংমেই পাহাড়ি গোষ্ঠীদের নিজস্ব অঞ্চল তৈরির দাবি তুললেও এতকাল জেড আর এ-র তৎপরতা বাড়াবাড়ির পথিয়ে পৌঁছানি। আইজ্যাক-মুইতা গোষ্ঠীর এন এস এন এবং ডিমা হালিম ডাওগা — এই দুই সংগঠন কোম্পার সঙ্গে অস্ত্র সংবরণ চুক্তি করার পরে জেড আর এ কিছু দিন ধরে তোলা সংগ্রহ, হুমকি প্রত্নুতি শুরু করেছে।

এর সঙ্গে যুক্ত হয়েছে ক্ষমতা ধরে রাখার চেষ্টা বা আশায় এক শ্রেণীর রাজনীতিকের সঙ্গে জঙ্গিদের গোপন যোগাযোগ। উত্তর-পূর্বের প্রতিটি রাজ্যেই হচ্ছে এই ধরনের ঘটনা। কিছুকাল আগে অরুণাচল প্রদেশে রাজনৈতিক পালান্দলের নেপথ্যে এন এস সি এন-এর মদতের অভিযোগ নিয়ে যথেষ্ট হইচই হয়। অভিযোগ যায় দিল্লিতে।

অসমে তো বিরোধী ও শাসক ৪৬ বিধায়কের উপরে নজর রাখতে শুরু করে গোস্বন্দারা। এঁদের মধ্যে কয়েকজন মন্ত্রীও আছেন। এই বিধায়কেরা কোন জঙ্গিদের সঙ্গে গোপন আঁতাত করছেন, তার তালিকাও তৈরি হয়। মেঘালয়েও রাজনীতিক-জঙ্গি আঁতাত নিয়ে হইচই হয়েছে একাধিকবার।

আগেই বলা হয়েছে যে, কয়েকটি প্রতীবেশী রাষ্ট্রের প্রত্যক্ষ ও পরোক্ষ মদতের সঙ্গে এই অঞ্চলের এক শ্রেণীর মানুষেরও সন্ত্রাসে উল্লাস রয়েছে। এই পোষে প্রধান দোষী রাজনৈতিক নেতারা। যেমন, মণিপুরে

গজাচ্ছে নয় জঙ্গি দল

কয়েক মাস আগে দেখা গেল জঙ্গিরা এক মন্ত্রীর নতুন কোনো মারুতি জিপসি চালিয়ে দিবি ঘুরে বেড়াচ্ছে। ছবি ছাপা হল কাগজে। সরকার চুপ করে রইল।

এই রকম ঘটনা পরের পর জানাজানি হতে শেষ পর্যন্ত কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী অবিধি বাধা হয়ে মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর কাছে ক্ষোভ জালিয়ে অভিব্যক্তির হেঁটে ফেলতে বলেন। কিন্তু অভিব্যক্তেরা বহাল তবিয়তে এখনও আছেন। এই সেদিন তাইজ্যান্ডের রাজধানীতে এন এস সি এন (আই এম) নেতা ধুইঙ্গালেন মুইভা এক সাক্ষাৎকারে জানিয়ে দেন, 'প্রাক্তন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী এস সি জামিদের কংগ্রেস মন্ত্রিসভা খালি গোস্টার সাহায্য নিয়ে জগ্যায় করে যাচ্ছিল। তাই আমরা তাদের সরিয়ে দিতে কংগ্রেসেরই নেইকিউ রিও-কে দল ডাঙিয়ে এনে ডেমোক্রেটিক অ্যালয়ান্স অব নাগাল্যান্ড নাম দিয়ে জোট তৈরি করিয়ে ক্ষমতায় বসিয়ে দিয়েছি। এখন মানুষ শান্তিতেই আছেন। ভারত সরকারের সঙ্গে আমাদের শান্তি আলোচনাতেও কেউ আর বাধা দিচ্ছে না'। বুকুন কাণ্ড।

ত্রিপুরায় আসুন, এখানে শাসক সি পি এম এবং বিরোধী কংগ্রেস-আই এন সি টি উভয়েই পরস্পরের প্রতি সন্ত্রাসবাদীদের সাহায্য করার অভিযোগ করে প্রকাশ্যে। রাজ্যের মানুষের কানে মন্ত্রের মত ঢুকিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে যে, এন এল এফ টি হল বিরোধী দলের সমর্থক এবং অল ত্রিপুরা টাইগার ফোর্স শাসক বামপন্থীদের। তবে, এই অভিযোগের প্রতিবাদে প্রচারের চক্কানিদান অবশ্যই আছে।

কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রক উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলের নিরাপত্তা ব্যবস্থা খতিয়ে দেখা এবং সেইমত ভূগুরুটি সম্পর্কে ক্ষেত্রকে পরামর্শ দেওয়ার জন্য বিভিন্ন ক্ষেত্রের বিশেষজ্ঞদের নিয়ে ২০০১ সালের ১২ নভেম্বর একটি স্টাডি গ্রুপ তৈরি করে। এর চেয়ারম্যান করা হয় প্রাক্তন আই এ এন অফিসার এস কে অগ্নিহোত্রীকে। সদস্য হন

অসম কাভারের আই পি এস অফিসার কে পি এস গিল, অবসরপ্রাপ্ত লেফটেন্যান্ট জেনারেল এস কে পিলাইয়ের মতো ব্যক্তিত্ব। এ ছাড়াও ক্রমশে ছিলেন স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রকের গোয়েন্দা বিভাগের দুই পদস্থ অফিসার। গত বছর মে মাসে তাঁরা একটি প্রতিবেদন পেশ করেন কেন্দ্রের কাছে। পরে সাংবাদিকদের লিখিত বিবৃতি দিয়ে বিশেষজ্ঞরা বলেন, "ছয় রাজ্যে মন্ত্রীদের সঙ্গে হাত মিলিয়ে জঙ্গিরা সমান্তরাল প্রশাসন চালাচ্ছে। এই কাজে সহায়তা করছে বিধায়ক, আমলা ও পুলিশ। ফলে, জেলা থেকে ব্লকস্তর অবিধি সরকারি প্রশাসনের আর কোনও অস্তিত্ব নেই।"

রিপোর্টে বলা হয়, জঙ্গিরা সাধারণ মানুষের থেকে জোর করে যে তোলা আদায় করে, মন্ত্রীরাও তার ভাগ পান। বদলে নেতারা নিরাপত্তা বাহিনীর জঙ্গিবিরোধী অভিযানে নানাভাবে বাধা সৃষ্টি করেন। রিপোর্টে একমাত্র অনুল্লেক্ষ ছিল ত্রিপুরার নাম।

ত্রিপুরা এবং কিছুটা অসম ছাড়া উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলের বাকি সব রাজ্যেই ঘন ঘন সরকার বদলায়। এই প্রসঙ্গে রিপোর্টে বলা হয় আরও মারাত্মক কথা— "এর দ্রুত পরিবর্তনের ফলে শাসনব্যবস্থায় অস্থিরতা দেখা দেয়। এ সব রাজ্যের মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর বিধায়কদের টাকা জোগান। বিধায়ক-পিছু মাসে খরচ হয় প্রায় ১১ লক্ষ টাকা। এই টাকা আসে সরকারি কোষাগার, ঠিকাদারদের থেকে আদায় করা কামিশন এবং জঙ্গিদের আদায় করা তোলার অংশ থেকে।" এটা ছিল প্রাথমিক রিপোর্ট। এই কথা জানাজানি হতে ত্রিপুরা ছাড়া উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলের কোনও মুখ্যমন্ত্রী স্টাডি গ্রুপের সদস্যদের সঙ্গে দেখা করেননি।

এই রিপোর্টের পরে উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলে সন্ত্রাসের মূলোচ্ছেদ করার কাভারি হিসাবে রাজনীতিক কারবারিদের কি আর কেউ বিশ্বাস করবে? সরকারি বাস আসে। নতুন টুপি, নতুন রঙের জামা পরে নতুন হাসি হেসে ফিরে ফিরে আসেন সেই পুরোনরাই। (শেষ)

ভারতকে দুর্বল করতে উঃ-পূর্বাঞ্চলে থাবা

দেশের উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চল মানেই সন্ত্রাসের সূত্রিকাগার। বছর যায়, জঙ্গিপনার অবসান হয় না। পুলিশ-সেনা অভিযান চলে, উন্নয়নের জন্য অর্থ ব্যয় হয়, কিন্তু সন্ত্রাসের অবসান হয় না। রাজনৈতিক নেতারা কখনও ক্ষমতা দখল করতে, কখনও বা ক্ষমতায় টিকে থাকতে জঙ্গিদের মদত নেন, মদত দেন। বন্ধুবর্ষে প্রতিবেশী দেশ মদত জোগায় জঙ্গিদের। বিশ্বাসেই হোক বা ভক্তিতে বা ভয়ে জঙ্গিদের মেনে চলেন সাধারণ মানুষ। সবমিলে সন্ত্রাসের জালে আবদ্ধ গোটা অঞ্চল। ভুটানের সেনা অভিযান ও পাশাপাশি আরও কয়েকটি ঘটনা কি সেই জাল ছিন্ন করতে পারবে? সেই সূত্রের সন্ধানই এই প্রতিবেদন।

অশোক সেনগুপ্ত ● গুয়াহাটি ও প্রভাত ঘোষ ● আগরতলা

চন্দ্রশুপ্তের প্রতি চাণক্যের পরামর্শ ছিল— রুটি মাঝখান থেকে খাওয়া যায় না, ধার থেকে খেতে হয়। তেমনই একটা দেশকে দুর্বল করতে হলে ধীরে ধীরে দুর্বল করতে হয় তার সীমানাকে।

শুপুরাজকে এই পরামর্শ কৃত ব্রাহ্মণ সত্যিই দিয়েছিলেন কি না, তার তথ্য প্রমাণে না গিয়েও বলা যায় চিন, বাংলাদেশ ও মায়ানমারের সীমান্ত দিয়ে ঘেরা ভারতের উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলকে বহু যুগ আগে থেকেই রুটির ধার কুরে কুরে খাওয়ার চেষ্টা চলছে। তাতে বুঝে এবং না বুঝে সামিল হয়েছে এই এলাকার একাংশ মানুষ। দারিদ্র বা পিছিয়ে পড়া উপজাতি সমাজ এবং দুর্বল আর্থ-সামাজিক সমস্যাই সন্ত্রাসের একমাত্র কারণ নয়।

উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলের আর্থিক বনিয়াদ দৃঢ় করার প্রতি কেন্দ্রের অনীহার অভিযোগও ততটা সত্য নয়। ততটা সত্য নয় দারিদ্রজনিত বা উপজাতি সমাজের অনগ্রসরতা সম্পর্কিত অভিযোগ, উত্তর পূর্বাঞ্চলের আর্থিক বনিয়াদ দৃঢ় করার প্রতি কেন্দ্রের অবিচারের অভিযোগ। আরও বিশদ করে বলতে গেলে, বিভিন্ন ভাবে গত দেড় দশকে কেন্দ্র উত্তর পূর্বাঞ্চল যথেষ্ট বিনিয়োগ করা সত্ত্বেও বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদ কমেনি। দারিদ্র্য বা উপজাতি সমাজের অনগ্রসরতা সম্পর্কিত অভিযোগ উত্তর পূর্বাঞ্চলের ক্ষেত্রে সত্যি হলে এতদিনে সাবেক বিহারের দক্ষিণাঞ্চল (বর্তমানে ঝাড়খন্ড), ওড়িশা, দক্ষিণ ভারতের বিভিন্ন উপজাতি প্রধান এলাকা বহুকাল আগেই রক্তক্ষয়ী বিদ্রোহে ফেটে পড়ত।

উত্তর পূর্বের সব ক'টি রাজ্য আর্থিক অনগ্রসরতার যুক্তিতে কেন্দ্রের কাছে 'স্পেশাল ক্যাটাগরি' রাজ্য বলে পরিচিত। ফলে, ভারত সরকারের কোষাগার থেকে অন্য

রাজ্যের তুলনায় অনেক বেশি আর্থিক সুবিধা পায় এই সাত রাজ্য। তাতে যেমন দারিদ্র কমেনি, তেমনই শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য বা অন্য প্রয়োজনীয় পরিকাঠামোও গড়ে তোলা যায়নি। শুধু সৃষ্টি হয়েছে অসম্ভব ধনী এক শ্রেণীর মধ্যস্বভোগীর। প্রবীণ ঐতিহাসিক অমলেন্দু গুহ অবশ্য মনে করেন, উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতের সাধারণ মানুষের একটি বড় অংশের দৃঢ় বিশ্বাস বহিরাগতদের চাপে স্থানীয় সংস্কৃতি লুপ্ত হয়ে যেতে পারে।

এর সঙ্গে যুক্ত হয়েছে এখানকার তীব্র বেকার সমস্যা। নানা কারণে অসম-সহ উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চল দেশের অন্যান্য অঞ্চলের চেয়ে উল্লেখযোগ্য রকম পিছিয়ে গিয়েছে। এই অসম-পরিস্থিতির অবসান না হলে এই অঞ্চলের সন্ত্রাসবাদ নির্মূল করা সম্ভব হবে না।

১৯৪৭এ ভারতের স্বাধীনতার পর থেকে একটা দশকও উত্তর পূর্বাঞ্চল শান্ত থাকেনি। প্রত্যেক দশকে নতুন নতুন রাজনৈতিক আন্দোলনের জন্ম হয়েছে, আরও উগ্র হিংসাত্মক বিদ্রোহের রূপ নিয়েছে। এই ধরনের প্রতিটি আন্দোলনের পিছনেই রয়েছে নিজেদের জাতিগত পরিচয়ের প্রতিষ্ঠা সম্পর্কিত আকাঙ্ক্ষা। 'এখনোপলিটিক্যাল' বা জাতি-রাজনৈতিক আন্দোলনের চরম রূপ উগ্রপন্থী বিদ্রোহ। উত্তর পূর্বাঞ্চলের সাতটি রাজ্যের মধ্যে পাঁচটি কোনও না কোনও সময়ে এই যুদ্ধে কৈশে উঠেছে। এবং, বাকি দু'টি রাজ্যও রয়েছে আশেপাশের উপরে।

পঞ্চাশের দশকে ভারত যুক্তরাষ্ট্র স্থাপিত হওয়ার পর থেকে নাগাল্যান্ড ও মণিপুরে বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদের বাসনা মানুষের মনের গভীরতম প্রদেশে স্থান করে নিয়েছে। মিজোরামে এই চিন্তার প্রসার ঘটেছে ষাটের দশকে, ত্রিপুরায় সত্তরের এবং অসমে সবচেয়ে শেষে— আশির দশকে। বাকি দুই রাজ্য মেঘালয় ও অরুণাচল প্রদেশে বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদ মাথা চাড়া দিয়েছে, পরিস্থিতি দ্রুত খারাপ হচ্ছে।

এই সব রাজ্যে এখন শুধু 'বহিরাগত'দের নয়, বিভিন্ন আদিম জাতির আন্দোলনের মধ্যেও অসন্তোষ ছড়িয়ে গিয়েছে। নাগাল্যান্ডের নাগা-কুকি, মিজোরামের মিজো (লুসাই), ব্রু, কখনও কখনও বিচ্ছিন্নভাবে মেঘালয়ে গারো বা খাসিদের সঙ্গে অসমীয়া বা শ্রীহট্ট থেকে আসা বাঙালিদের সংঘর্ষ ইত্যাদি এর বড় উদাহরণ। এই ধরনের সংঘর্ষ একেবারে খেমে যাওয়ার কোনও লক্ষণ দেখা যাচ্ছে না।

এর জন্য স্বাধীনতার আগে থেকে ব্রিটিশ শাসক ও মিশনারিদের দেওয়া ইন্ধন ও পরে চিন, পাকিস্তান ও বাংলাদেশের ত্রাস্পর্শকেও দোষী করেন অনেকে। যেমন, উত্তর পূর্বাঞ্চল-বিশেষজ্ঞ হিসাবে পরিচিত ইতিহাসবিদ বি কুমার। তাঁর কথায়, "উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতের সমাজ সম্পর্কে

ব্রিটিশদের বর্ণ-বিদ্বেষী অপব্যবস্থা সেখানকার জনগোষ্ঠীকে সামাজিক-সাংস্কৃতিক-ধর্মীয় মূলশ্রোত থেকে আরও দূরে সরিয়ে দিল।"

মূল লক্ষ্য সম্পূর্ণ স্বাধীনতা হলেও আপাতত সে দিকে জোর না দিয়ে গোটা উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলকে নিয়ে একটামাত্র স্বাশাসিত অঞ্চল গড়ে তোলার দাবিতে বিভিন্ন সংগঠনকে এক জোট করার উদ্যোগ নিয়েছে জঙ্গিরা। ত্রিপুরা পুলিশের বর্তমান ডিজি ঘনশ্যাম মুরারি শ্রীবাস্তব এ কথা বলেছেন। এই নয়া স্ট্যাটুজির ভিত্তিতে এই অঞ্চলের সাত রাজ্যের অধিকাংশ আঞ্চলিক ছাত্র সংগঠনকে নিয়ে গড়ে উঠেছে একটি সংগঠন। দ্বিতীয় ধাপে বিভিন্ন সামাজিক সংগঠনকে একত্র করার কাজ চলছে।

আশির দশকে মণিপুরের কাংলেইপাক কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি এই ধরনের অঞ্চল গড়ে তোলার তত্ত্ব প্রথম প্রচার করে। তাদের মূল বক্তব্য ছিল, উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলের সাত রাজ্যেরই আদি বাসিন্দা মূলত মঙ্গোলীয় জাতিগোষ্ঠী থেকে আগত। তাদের দৈহিক আদলই এর সবচেয়ে বড় প্রমাণ। তাই এই মানুষদের আলাদা হয়ে থাকার চেয়ে এক জোট হলে বিভিন্ন সমস্যার সমাধান সহজে সম্ভব। এই তত্ত্বের নাম দেওয়া হয় 'ব্রাচিন তত্ত্ব' (মঙ্গোলীয় আদলের মানুষদের ব্রা বা বরক বা বরো বা বড়া বলা হয়। আর, চৈনিক উৎপত্তি বোঝাতে চিন)। মণিপুরের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি একটি মানচিত্রও তৈরি করে প্রস্তাবিত স্বশাসিত অঞ্চলের জন্য। তাতে মেঘালয়, নাগাল্যান্ড, মণিপুর এবং মিজোরামের সম্পূর্ণ অংশ এবং অসমের বরাক উপত্যকা ছাড়া বাকি সব এলাকা অন্তর্ভুক্ত করা হয়। এ ছাড়া, ত্রিপুরার সমতল বাদে পাহাড় এলাকা ও অরুণাচলের কিছু অংশও অন্তর্ভুক্ত হয় মানচিত্রে। 'ব্রাচিন' তত্ত্বের মূল কথা ছিল স্বশাসিত অঞ্চল হোক ভারতের সীমানার ভিতরে ও ভারতীয় সংবিধান মেনে এবং এই অঞ্চলের মধ্যে বাংলাদেশের পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামেরও কিছু অঞ্চলকে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করার প্রচার চালানো হয়। কিন্তু আশির দশকের প্রথম দিকে ছড়ানো কাংলেইপাক কমিউনিস্ট পার্টির এই তত্ত্ব মোটেই জনপ্রিয় হয়নি এবং দলও উঠে যায়। পুরনো তত্ত্বের উপর ভিত্তি করেই গড়ে উঠেছে উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চল ছাত্র সংগঠনের (নেসো) মতো সংগঠন।

ত্রিপুরার পুলিশকর্তা জানান, নেসো-র প্রধান ও অসমের জঙ্গি সংগঠন আসু-র উপদেষ্টা সমুজ্জল ভট্টাচার্য ও তাঁর সঙ্গীসাথীদের পিছনে কারা আছে, তা নিরাপত্তা বাহিনী জানে। তাঁরা কী উদ্দেশ্যে ওই পুরনো তত্ত্বের ভিত্তিতে কাজ করছেন, তাও পুলিশের অজানা নয়। আপাতত স্বশাসিত অঞ্চলের উদ্দেশ্য সামনে রেখে প্রচার চালালেও নেসো-র মতো সংস্থার আসল উদ্দেশ্য সুদূর প্রসারিত। (চলবে)

ভস্ম থেকে উঠে জঙ্গিরা ফের সক্রিয় হবে না, নিশ্চয়তা নেই

দেশের উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চল মানেই সন্ত্রাসের সূতিকাগার। বছর যায়, জঙ্গিপনীর অবসান হয় না। পুলিশি-সেনা অভিযান চলে, উন্নয়নের জন্য অর্থ ব্যয় হয়, কিন্তু সন্ত্রাসের অবসান হয় না। রাজনৈতিক নেতারা কখনও ক্ষমতা দখল করতে, কখনও বা ক্ষমতায় টিকে থাকতে জঙ্গিদের মদত নেন, মদত দেন। বন্ধুবর্ষে প্রতিবেশী দেশ মদত জোগায় জঙ্গিদের। বিশ্বাসেই হোক বা উদ্ভিতে বা ভয়ে জঙ্গিদের মনে চলেন সাধারণ মানুষ। সবমিলে সন্ত্রাসের জালে আবদ্ধ গোটা অঞ্চল। ভূটানের সেনা অভিযান ও পাশাপাশি আরও কয়েকটি ঘটনা কি সেই জাল ছিন্ন করতে পারবে? সেই সূত্রের সন্ধানই এই প্রতিবেদন।

অশোক সেনগুপ্ত ● গুয়াহাটি ও প্রভাত ঘোষ ● আগরতলা

অপারেশন অল ক্লিয়ার। শুধু এই একটা অভিযানের জন্য ভূটানের কাছে কৃতজ্ঞ হয়ে থাকবে ভারত। ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রী, উপপ্রধানমন্ত্রী-সহ অনেকে বার বার প্রকাশ্যেও স্বীকার করেছেন কথাটি।

না থেকে উপায়ই বা কি? উত্তর-পূর্বের জঙ্গিনিধনে আগের দুই 'অপারেশন'-এর চেয়েও ভূটানের 'অপারেশন অল ক্লিয়ার' অনেক বেশি কার্যকর হয়েছে। এক যুগ আগে সন্ত্রাসদীর্ঘ অসমে জরুরি অবস্থা জারির পরে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার বিশেষ সেনা-অভিযানের নির্দেশ দেওয়ায় পরিচালিত হয়েছিল 'অপারেশন বজরং' এবং 'অপারেশন রাইনো'। এ সব দেখার দায়িত্বে যিনি ছিলেন, সেই লেফটেন্যান্ট জেনারেল অজয় সিংহ অবসরের পরে এখন অসমের রাজ্যপাল। তিনিও আগের দুই অভিযানের চেয়ে হালের অভিযানের সাফল্য স্বীকার করছেন কুঠা বোধ করেননি।

উত্তর-পূর্ব স্বাধীন ভারতে প্রথম স্ফূর্তির অভিযান শুরু হয় মিজো পাহাড়ে ১৯৫৯-৬০ সালের 'মৌতম' বা আকালের সময়। তখন ও অসমের ছিল অসমের অধীন। বাঁশ গাছে ফল আসার প্রাকৃতিক নিয়ম মেনে হুঁড়ুর ব্যাপক

বংশবৃদ্ধি এবং তার ফলে খাদ্যশস্য নিশ্চিহ্ন হয়ে যাওয়ায় সঙ্কটে পড়ে গরিব পাহাড়ি এলাকার দরিদ্র মানুষ। খাদ্যের দাবিতে তাদের অসহিষ্ণু হয়ে ওঠার খবর রাজ্যের রাজধানী এবং দেশের রাজধানীতে সঠিক ভাবে পৌঁছয়নি। সর্দার বল্লভভাই প্যাটেল ছিলেন কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী। খাবার পাঠানোর বদলে মিজোদের চূপ করিয়ে রাখতে সেখানে সেনা পাঠানো হল। অসহায় পাহাড়িদের মনে সেই যে একেছের অবিচারের দৃঢ় বিশ্বাস ঢুকে গিয়েছিল, তা আজও নির্মূল হয়নি। অস্ত্র হাতে তুলে নিয়েছিল মিজো ন্যাশনাল ফ্রন্ট (এম এন এফ)। সশস্ত্র আন্দোলন শুরু করে নাগাল্যান্ডের এন এস সি এন। বার্মিজ সেনা-শাসকের সাহায্য পেয়ে তারা ভয়ঙ্কর হয়ে ওঠে। আস্তে আস্তে ছড়িয়ে পড়ে উত্তর-পূর্বের বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদ। পড়শি কিছু রাষ্ট্রের মদত এই বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদের সমৃদ্ধির সহায়ক হয়। গত কয়েক দশকে কেবল এই অঞ্চলে প্রতিরক্ষাখাত প্রত্যক্ষ ও পরোক্ষ যে পরিমাণ অর্থ ব্যয় হয়েছে, নিঃসন্দেহে তাতে যে কোনও লোকের ঘুম উবে যাবে।

ফিনিক্স পাখির মতো ভস্ম থেকে আবার যে জঙ্গিদল মজবুত হয়ে উঠবে না, তার নিশ্চয়তা তাই মিলেছে না। এর দু'টি কারণ: এক, বাংলাদেশের ব্যাপারে অনিশ্চয়তা। দুই: নির্খোঁজ জঙ্গিদের সঙ্গবদ্ধ হওয়ার চেষ্টা। মিজোরামের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী জোরামথাঙ্গা বার বার বলেছেন, তাঁরা যখন নিষিদ্ধ আন্দোলন করতেন, সেই পূর্ব পাকিস্তানীদের আমলে সেনারা পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম অঞ্চলে লুকিয়ে থাকতে সাহায্য করত। ত্রিপুরার মুখ্যমন্ত্রী মানিক সরকার তো বার বার সরব হয়েছেন জঙ্গিদের বাংলাদেশে প্রশ্রয় পাওয়ার অভিযোগে। চট্টগ্রাম পার্বত্য অঞ্চলে যখনই ভারতের আত্মগোপনকারী জঙ্গিদের ঘাঁটিতে অভিযান চালানো হয়েছে, তখনই মিলেছে প্রচুর অস্ত্র।

তা সত্ত্বেও সরকারি ভাবে ওই সব ঘাঁটির কথা স্বীকার করা হয়নি। সম্প্রতি সার্ক সম্মেলনের ঠিক আগে-পরে বাংলাদেশ সরকার আবার দেশের কিছু জঙ্গিঘাঁটিতে অভিযান চালিয়ে প্রচুর অস্ত্র আটক করে। বিজ্ঞপ্তির মাধ্যমে অবশ্য বাংলাদেশ সরকার স্বীকার করে এন এল এফ টি-র আত্মগোপনকারী ছয় জনকে ধরার কথা। স্থানীয় সংবাদপত্রে প্রকাশিত হয় এই বিজ্ঞপ্তির খবর। অবশ্যই এটিকে

সম্ভাবনার একটা রূপালি রেখা বলে ধরা যেতে পারে।

এই রেখাকে আরও আশাব্যঞ্জক করে তুলতে গেলে অগ্রণী ভূমিকা নিতে হবে ভারতকে। জঙ্গিনিধনের ব্যাপারে ভূটান যে ভাবে ভারতের অনুরোধ মানতে পেরেছে, মূলত আন্তর্জাতিক এবং অভ্যন্তরীণ রাজনীতির কারণে বাংলাদেশের পক্ষে তা সম্ভব নয়। ভূটানের বিদেশমন্ত্রী লিয়োনপো খাম্ফু ওয়াংচু বলেছিলেন, "মোস্ট সিরিয়াস থ্রেট ইন দি কিংডমস হিঙ্গি"। সে দেশের একমাত্র সরকারি সাপ্তাহিক 'কুয়েনসেল' এই উক্তি-সহকারে জানিয়েছিল, আলফা-র সদর ঘাঁটি (জি এইচ কিউ) আছে সামড্রুপ জোংখারের মেরেংফু-তে। সি এইচ কিউ আছে ফুকাপটংয়ে। এন ডি এফ বি-র মূল ঘাঁটি সামড্রুপ জোংখারের টিকরিতে। কে এল ও-র সামটসা জেলায়। বাংলাদেশ কোনও দিন স্বীকার করেনি ও দেশে ভারতের জঙ্গিরা ঘাঁটি গড়েছে। বাংলাদেশের ভিতর দিয়ে ভারতের পশ্চিম সরবরাহের কথা যত বার উঠেছে, সে দেশের গোয়েন্দা সংস্থা 'ডি জি এফ আই' তত বার 'সার্বভৌমত্ব নষ্ট হবে'— এই যুক্তি দেখিয়ে কড়া আপত্তি জানিয়েছে।

কত জঙ্গি ছিল ভূটানে, সঠিক হিসেব পাওয়া যায়নি। ভূটানে সংবাদপত্র বলতে একমাত্র সরকারি সাপ্তাহিক 'কুয়েনসেল'। তাতে ২২ নভেম্বর সংখ্যায় দেখা যাচ্ছে আলফার আটটি শিবিরে ছিল ১,৫৬০ জন। এন ডি এফ বি-র নয়টি শিবিরে ৭৪০ জন, কে এল ও-র তিনটি শিবিরে আছে ৪৩০ জন। সব মিলিয়ে সংখ্যাটি ২,৭৩০। ১৬ ডিসেম্বরের এটির ইন্টারনেট সংস্করণে দেখা যাচ্ছে সংখ্যাটি "ওয়েল আর্মড ইন এক্সেস অব থ্রি থাউজেন্ট"।

আর, ভূটানের পররাষ্ট্র অধিকর্তা ইয়েশি দরজি ১৮ ডিসেম্বর জানিয়েছিলেন, সংখ্যাটা হবে প্রায় ৩ হাজার। ওই দিন তিনি বলেন, "জঙ্গিদের ৩০টি ঘাঁটিই আমরা ইতিমধ্যে নিষ্ক্রিয় করে দিয়েছি।" কিন্তু অভিযান শুরুর দেড় সপ্তাহ বাদে, বলা যেতে পারে অভিযান-শেষে, ২ জানুয়ারি ভারতের সেনাপ্রধান জেনারেল নির্মলচন্দ্র ভিজ বলেন, "ভূটান রাজ্যের সেনারা ১৪৫ জন বন্দিকে আমাদের হাতে অর্পণ করেছে। নিষ্ক্রিয় করেছে প্রায় ৬৫০ জনকে।" আলফা-র নির্খোঁজ নেতাদের কে কোথায় আছেন, তার সঠিক তথ্য এই মুহূর্তে পাওয়া মুশকিল। (চলবে)

জঙ্গি-পতাকা নামল, তবু উঃ-পূর্বে শান্তি নিয়ে শঙ্কা

দেশের উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চল মানেই সন্ত্রাসের সূতিকাগার। বছর যায়, জঙ্গিপন্যার অবসান হয় না। পুলিশি-সেনা অভিযান চলে, উন্নয়নের জন্য অর্থ ব্যয় হয়, কিন্তু সন্ত্রাসের অবসান হয় না। রাজনৈতিক নেতারা কখনও ক্ষমতা দখল করতে, কখনও বা ক্ষমতায় টিকে থাকতে জঙ্গিদের মদত নেন, মদত দেন। বন্ধুবেশে প্রতিবেশী দেশ মদত জোগায় জঙ্গিদের। বিশ্বসেই হোক বা ভক্তিতে বা ভয়ে জঙ্গিদের মনে চলেন সাধারণ মানুষ। সবমিলে সন্ত্রাসের জালে আবদ্ধ গাটা অঞ্চল। ভুটানের সেনা অভিযান ও পাশাপাশি আরও কয়েকটি ঘটনা কি সেই জাল খিঁচ করতে পারবে? সেই সূত্রের সন্ধানই এই প্রতিবেদন।

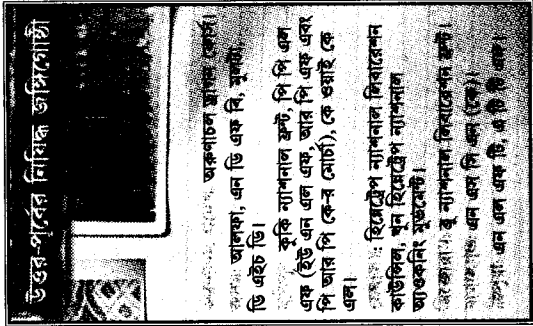
অশোক সেনগুপ্ত ● গুয়াহাটি ও প্রভাত ঘোষ ● আগরতলা

একটি পতাকা নেমে যাচ্ছে। ফুট তিন ব্যবধানে রাখা দণ্ডে তোলা হচ্ছে আর একটি পতাকা। সামনে লক্ষাধিক লোকের

সমাবেশ। মঞ্চে অসমের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী-সহ তাড় তাড় জনপ্রতিনিধি। শুরু হল একটা 'শান্তির যুগ'।

বিদ্রোহীদের পতাকা নামিয়ে রাখার এই দৃশ্য এর আগেও একবার হয়েছিল। বড়ো স্বশাসিত অঞ্চল (বি এ টি) তৈরির সময়ে। কিন্তু শান্তি আসেনি। আশার উপর ভরসা করে ২০০৩ সালের ৭ নভেম্বরের তারিখটিকে 'শান্তির যুগ'-এর শুরু বলে চিহ্নিত করেন অসমের রাজ্যপাল-মুখ্যমন্ত্রী দু:জনেই। সন্ত্রাসবাদে দীর্ঘ উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতের একটি অংশের যুগ কেড়ে নিয়েছিল বড়ো লিবারেশন টাইগার (বি এল টি)। কোকরাঝাড়ে তাই ওদের পতাকা নামিয়ে যখন শান্তির প্রতীক সাপা পতাকা তোলা হল, অসম রাইফেলসের 'ব্লাক ক্যাট'-দের কড়া পাহারায় আনা পাঁচ ট্রাক বোম্বাই জঙ্গিদের নিষিদ্ধ আয়োজিত যখন সমর্পিত হল প্রশাসনের কর্তাদের কাছে, 'শান্তির যুগের সূত্রপাত' ছাড়া আর কীই বা বলতে পারতেন ওরা।

এর ঠিক পাঁচ সপ্তাহ বাদে ঘটল আরও একটি উল্লেখযোগ্য ঘটনা। সন্ত্রাসবাদের কথিলে শেষ পেরেক ঠোকর চেঙ্গায় ভারতের ক্রমাগত চাপের কাছে নতি স্বীকার করে ১৪ ডিসেম্বর গভীর রাতে ভুটানে শুরু হল সেনা-অভিযান 'অপারেশন



পড়ল বেশ কিছু জঙ্গি। সন্দেহ নেই, ভোটের মুখে পর পর এই রকম দুটি ঘটনাকে বি জে পি তার মুকুটের পালক বলে দাবি করার চেষ্টা করবে। বি এল টি-র বলে এই উত্তর-পূর্বে কেউ কেউ সমঝোতার পথে হাটতে শুরু করেছে। আইজ্যাক-মুইভাপছী ন্যাশনাল সোস্যালিস্ট কাউন্সিল অব নাগালিমের (এন এস সি এন-আই এম), ডিমা হালিম ডাওগা ইতিমধ্যে স্বাক্ষর করেছে অস্ত্র-সংবরণ চুক্তিতে। এন এস সি এন-এর অপেক্ষাকৃত ছোট গোষ্ঠীর ৮৮ বছরের বৃদ্ধ নেতা খাপলাংয়ের মায়ানমারের সাগাইং ডিভিশনের তেজু তেখাপ জোখু উপত্যকার জঙ্গলের প্রধান আস্তানা থেকে অনুমতি নিয়ে সংগঠনের এক প্রতিনিধিত্ব 'মন্ত্রী' (কিলোনসর) কুয়ালু মুলটোন জানিয়েছেন, তারাও দিল্লির সঙ্গে আলোচনায় বসতে আগ্রহী। নয়নবাসী জামাতিয়া গোষ্ঠীর এন এল এক টি-র মতো সংগঠন আসতে চাইছে আপোসের রাস্তায়। ফলে, তামাম উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতে বড় শত্রু-সংগঠন বলতে দাঁড়িয়েছে ইউনাইটেড লিবারেশন ফ্রন্ট অব অসম (আলফা), ন্যাশনাল ডেমোক্রেটিক ফ্রন্ট অব বড়োয়্যাড (এন ডি এক বি), বিশ্বমোহন গোষ্ঠীর ন্যাশনাল লিবারেশন ফ্রন্ট অব ত্রিপুরা (এন এল এক টি) এবং

অনেকেই। এর মূল কারণ দু জঙ্গিদের বড় অংশটি এখনও পথে। দুই: বাংলাদেশ। প্রতিবেশী ভারতের আত্মগোপনকারী জঙ্গি কথা বরাবর অস্বীকার করে ঢাকার কর্তারা। গত ২৪ শিলংয়ের পতাকা-বৈঠকে বি তরফে আগের বৈঠকের মত কর্তাদের হাতে তুলে দেওয়া তালিকা। সেই তালিকায় আলফা-র ২৭টি, এন এস সি ডি এক বি-র ১৪টি, মুসলি লিবারেশন টাইগার অব ৭ এবং মেখালয়ের আছি এর পর

Gogoi wants Bhutan showcased at Saarc

Stateman News Service

GUWAHATI, Jan. 1. — The Assam chief minister, Mr Tarun Gogoi, has asked Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee to raise the issue of north-east insurgents taking refuge in Bangladesh and Myanmar, at the upcoming Saarc summit in Islamabad.

Mr Gogoi told mediapersons here today that intelligence reports indicated that there were more camps of the Ulfa and NDFB in Myanmar than in Bangladesh.

He said that if these camps were not demolished then the militants, now smarting from the operations in Bhutan, may regroup once again and carry on with their subversive activities with renewed vigour.

In his letter faxed to the Prime Minister, Mr Gogoi said: "The operations carried out by Bhutan against the militants operating in Assam have provided the much needed strength and impetus to our anti-insurgency measures. Our efforts in this regard will be further bolstered if similar operations are carried out in Bangladesh and Myanmar as well."

"We are now expecting the closure of militant camps in Bhutan will be followed by similar operations against the militant bases in Bangladesh and Myanmar, so that the effect of the Bhutan operations is not diluted. "In this context, the SAARC summit in Islamabad from January 4 to 6, 2004 has assumed much significance for us,

as a regional initiative to prevent terrorism will reportedly be discussed. I may also mention that for an insurgency hit state like ours, after the adoption of the SAARC regional convention on suppression of terrorism at Kathmandu, there is need for more effective follow up action by all concerned. "I would like to request you to kindly to take up the issue of immediate eviction of militant camps in Bangladesh and Myanmar at the SAARC summit in Islamabad."

Mr Gogoi was of the firm view that the Bhutan action alone could not solve the problem. The insurgent leaders might come forward for talks only if pressure was mounted on the outfits including the two countries as well, he said.

North-east could be economic bridgehead to S-E Asia: PM

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 20. — The North-east has to shed its present image of being a hotbed of militancy to become the "economic bridgehead" to South-east Asia, Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said today.

At the inauguration of the North-east business summit here, Mr Vajpayee urged the people of the eight states in the region to move with the times. He said the states should join the mainstream and follow the government's Look East policy.

The North-east is likely to directly benefit from the BIMST-EC grouping in which Nepal and Bhutan will soon join. A summit level meeting of the grouping will be taking place later this year and India is actively pursuing promotion of regional and sub-regional trade and economic cooperation.

The Prime Minister said: "Our North-eastern states can become our economic bridgehead to

South-east Asia. Equally, vibrant commercial exchanges with South-east Asia can galvanise growth and development in the North-east." Urging the people of the North-east to work hard to change people's perspective on the image of the region, he asked them to unitedly prepare the ground to participate vigorously in the emerging opportunities in South-east Asia. Locational advantage gives North-east the key to the door to South-east Asian markets, Mr Vajpayee said.

One of the ways to eradicate regional disparities is economic reforms and the government's aim has been to meet the developmental needs of the states in the region, the Prime Minister said, adding that the Centre has intentionally created a pool of non-lapsable funds for development of the region. The Prime Minister urged the states to utilise the funds at the ground level. The North-east has been lagging behind in development because

despite getting so much of central funds, the implementation is not seen on the surface, he said.

Slower economic growth has obviously resulted in fewer employment opportunities in the region which in turn has been exploited by certain extremist organisations, Mr Vajpayee said. To tackle such a situation, the government has comprehensive strategy with multi-pronged initiatives, such as the peace process in some states in the North East, he added. He urged the states to concentrate on small scale industries where large investments are not required.

Mr Vajpayee said the Centre would soon commence work on the 2000-MW Subansiri hydro-electric project in Arunachal Pradesh and the 130-MW Teesta Lower Dam Station III project in Sikkim. He said between 1998-99 and 2002-03, the government has released over Rs 44,000 crore of Central resources for N-E states, which include Rs 5,700 crore under the Prime Minister's package.

Summit may focus on Bangla trade

AGARTALA, Jan. 20. — The two-day North-east business summit is expected by states political quarters to shift focus on the region's trade prospects with an eye to Bangladesh. Tripura wants the Centre to persuade Dhaka to let the North-east avail of the benefits of the Chittagong and Ashugunj ports.

New Delhi has already proposed to the Bangladesh government to allow a corridor through the country to carry essentials to the landlocked northeast. Tripura government has written to the Centre that the Bangladesh ports will allow the northeast an easy access to the South-east Asian market.

Bangladesh is now considering India's proposal of allowing a corridor through that country for movement of passengers and goods. Now the road from Kolkata to Agartala is 1,800 km running through Assam and north Bengal areas. If Dhaka allows a transit facility this will be reduced to 350 km only. — SNS

21 JAN 2004

THE STATESMAN

2

JAN 2004

Arms for Ulfa, KLO... via Myanmar & Bangladesh

Statesman News Service 9 N 5 S 21

JALPAIGURI, Jan. 12. — The arms which the United Liberation Front of Asom and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation have been using were mostly brought from Myanmar and Bangladesh. The arms were smuggled into the Bhutan camps of the insurgents through Assam and the Jalpaiguri-Cooch Behar region in West Bengal.

After Bhutan's crackdown upon the anti-Indian insurgent outfits, Intelligence officials have been able to establish the route commonly used by the militants to smuggle in arms from Bangladesh and Myanmar.

The route, from Kalikhola in the Bhutan Hills to Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh, can be

traced through Jalpaiguri's Alipurduar subdivision, Dhubri district in Assam and Tura in Meghalaya upto Chittagong in Bangladesh. Ulfa militants had also used another route from Myanmar to Assam without entering Bangladesh.

But after Army operations were intensified in Assam, they opted for the other route.

KLO militants used to smuggle the weapons through Kumargramduar in Jalpaiguri to their Kalikhola camp with the help of some linkmen.

One such linkman, Takura Das, was arrested last year from Alipurduar in Jalpaiguri. He admitted during interrogation that he used to carry boxes of arms up to Kalikhola in Bhutan.

Jalpaiguri police arrested another linkman, Meghnath Roy, from Salkumar in

Kumargramduar last night.

Jalpaiguri SP Mr SN Gupta said this man used to store arms and ammunition brought by militants from Bangladesh in his house. Before the KLO militants set up the Bukka camp in Bhutan, 20 hand grenades from Bangladesh had been stored Roy's house. Roy was arrested after Tom and Milton revealed this during interrogation.

Roy had also been arrested earlier for supporting KLO activists, and put behind bars for 11 months. But after he was released, he once again associated himself with the Kamtapur liberation movement.

Another Indo-Bangladeshi route followed by insurgents in the North-east is through Mankachar in Assam.

NDFB militant Amarendra Doimari, who was arrested a year ago from Kumargramduar in Jalpaiguri, admitted this dur-

ing interrogation. He was on his way to Bangladesh with the target to buy more arms for his outfit when he was arrested, and Rs 10 lakh was recovered from him.

Jalpaiguri SP Mr Gupta, speaking to The Statesman, said the Ulfa and NDFB mostly used this route.

The KLO did not have to care much for arms as the Ulfa provided them with arms against money. But the SP ruled out any possibility of China being involved in the process of arms smuggling, though most of the arms recovered from the militants in the region are of Chinese origin. He said these arms were bought from Bangladesh and Myanmar, and that anybody could collect arms of any country in exchange of money. But he insisted on the Ulfa-ISI link up.

Sources said that about four months back the Ulfa had brought an arms assignment

from Bangladesh, including rocket launchers, rocket-propelled grenades and ammunition. In 2001, the KLO had brought an assignment of AK series rifles from Bangladesh. Most of these weapons were later transported to their camps in Bhutan.

Police and Intelligence officials said the Ulfa, NDFB and the KLO were ready to retaliate in case the Indian Army attacked their dens in the Bhutanese territory. But the recent Indo-Bhutanese operations had taken them by surprise.

Meanwhile the RBA is continuing its offensive against the militants. Heavy shelling was reported in the Kalikhola-Piping area in Bhutan yesterday. The Bhutanese army has occupied major camps of the militants, sources said. Some weapons were also recovered from that region.

1/10

REPEAT ACTION

Those who wield the gun respect no laws — at home or abroad. After Bhutan, it was Myanmar's turn to realize that rebels from India threatened its own peace. New Delhi has reasons to be happy that Yangon has finally followed Thimphu's example and launched an offensive against the Naga rebels using its territory. The Myanmar action seems to make two basic points. First, it shows that more countries in the region are waking up to the need for making common cause against outlaws and mercenaries. Second, it signals a better understanding between India and its neighbours on the issue. There were times when Yangon's military juntas followed a policy of aiding and sheltering Naga rebels with a view to putting diplomatic pressure on New Delhi. India too was deeply suspicious of the growing Chinese influence in Myanmar and did not help bilateral relations by openly supporting the democracy movement in that country in the late Eighties. The Myanmar army's action against the Naga camps has a message for Dhaka which it could have earlier read in Thimphu's offensive against Assamese, Bodo and Kamtapuri rebels. Bangladesh can only hurt its own — and the region's — security interests by delaying action against the north-eastern rebels operating from its territory.

It is difficult, however, to see how Yangon's action could derail the peace process between New Delhi and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim, led by Mr Isak Swu and Mr Thuingaleng Muivah. Although the Myanmar offensive was against the other NSCN faction, led by Mr S.S. Khaplang, the aim must have been to clear the country of all rebel hideouts. It cannot be in New Delhi's interest to be part of any Myanmar action that would destroy the peace initiative or the ceasefire in Nagaland. Those who see Yangon's action as a threat to the peace process are obviously misjudging the situation. It would actually help the overall peace initiative if Myanmar's action prompted the NSCN(K) also to join the peace-talks with New Delhi. Factional fights have cost the Naga rebels almost as dearly as their decades-old fight with Indian authorities. They can serve Nagaland's cause better by uniting for peace.

Naga Hoho against Bhutan rerun in Myanmar

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Deborshi Chaki in Kohima

Jan. 20. — The Naga Hoho, the apex body of all tribal organisations in Nagaland, will oppose any military action inside Myanmar directed against North-east insurgent groups that will target the Naga rebels as well.

Stating this today, general secretary of Naga Hoho Dr John Murry warned that any re-run of the Bhutan-like flush-out operation against Naga factions inside Myanmar will have severe repercussions and may paralyse the ongoing Naga peace talks between the Centre and NSCN-IM.

Dr Murry, however, said Naga Hoho has no objections to such an operation in the future against other North-east insurgent groups, including the UNLF, PLA and Uifa, who are believed to be deeply entrenched inside Myanmar and the hill tracts of Bangladesh. "We shall not poke our noses if both India and Myanmar decide to go jointly against the rebel groups who are running camps inside Myanmar and retreat there after carrying out attacks inside the Indian territory."

Dr Murry said political and territorial integration of all Naga-dominated areas of the region and neighbouring

Myanmar would be the first step towards the creation of an independent homeland for all tribes under the Naga family. "The progress so far in this regard has been satisfactory and the Indian government has so far been sincere in its efforts towards finding a lasting solution to the Naga problem, which more than five decades old now," he said.

Dr Murry added, "We are also making efforts to bring in the Khaplang faction of the NSCN to the negotiating table and the progress has been significant. They have agreed on several issues."

While praising the present Democratic Alliance of Nagaland government for its commitment to the Naga cause, the Hoho general secretary urged the Centre and the British government to consider the Naga issue through a historical perspective. While addressing a press meet organised by the British Deputy High Commission here, he said: "The British left the Naga people high and dry... They conquered us but never bothered to hand us back our independence when they left India." Dr Murry also said talks on Naga homeland would begin in Myanmar after the issue is settled in India.

Sangma heads towards NDA, meets Vajpayee

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The BJP received a shot in the arm in the North-East when former Lok Sabha speaker Purno Sangma called on the Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee on Sunday evening at the latter's residence to discuss the possibility of his recently-floated North-East People's Front (NEPF) joining the NDA.

The meeting came a day after Mr Sangma formally quit the Sharad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), of which he was a founder-member, protesting against the latter's impending tie-up with the Congress.

Emerging from his meeting with Mr Vajpayee, Mr Sangma said, "The NEPF will be discussing over the next couple of days how to contest the elections collectively against the Congress in the North-East. In my meeting with the PM, I discussed this."

Mr Sangma is now scheduled to give political shape to his NEPF, an alliance of non-Congress and non-Left political parties in the re-

gion, which includes NCP and BJP leaders of the area. Once this takes shape, the new party is likely to join the NDA, helping the BJP strengthen its position in the North-East, where the party has begun to make inroads.

As things stand, the BJP is part of the governments of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, while it has ruled out a political arrangement with the Asom Gana Parishad in Assam, where it has announced its intention of going it alone in the elections. However, Mr Sangma is keen to bring the AGP on board.

NEPF leaders from different North-Eastern states will meet here on Monday and Tuesday to finalise the strategy of the forum, which was formed to highlight the common problems of the region, before the ensuing general elections. High up on the agenda will be the question of whether the NEPF will join the NDA before the LS polls. However, Mr Sangma has so far ruled out the possibility of joining the BJP.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

19 JAN 2004

51-8
17/1

KLO, Ulfa sneaking into Assam, say reports

JALPAIGURI, Jan. 16. — Militants belonging to the KLO and the United Liberation Front of Asom are trying to infiltrate to the Dhubri district of Assam from the Jalpaiguri-Cooch Behar belt and are trying to pass to Bangladesh through Tura in Meghalaya, claimed intelligence reports today.

According to them, these militants have descended from the Bhutan hills during the RBA offensive and were hidden in the Jalpaiguri-Cooch Behar belt. Now they are trying to sneak into Bangladesh. Most of their leaders are now in Bangladesh, where they have some 20 camps.

Jalpaiguri SP Mr SN Gupta denied any knowledge.

The ultras, reportedly, have 15-odd KLO ultras including Mrinal Roy alias Prem, brother of KPP leader Mitali Roy and son of former minister Mr Jagadananda Roy, Bijoy Burman alias Saparia. — SNS

Manipur miasma

Change in leadership no solution

Manipur legislators are yet to learn a lesson from the June 2001 unrest that forced them to flee to Delhi for indulging in power games while the state's territorial integrity was under threat. There is no end to behind-the-scene activities to topple the government. No chief minister, even if he enjoys a comfortable majority, feels secure. Ever since Okram Ibobi Singh assumed office in March 2002 he has been doing a balancing act to stay in power by "buying" members from other smaller parties and is determined to run a purely Congress government. On the other hand, the Opposition Democratic People's Alliance of which the BJP is a constituent, wants him to step down for failure to improve law and order. Unless the Opposition manages to win over some Congress legislators it is in no position to form an alternative government, hence its insistence on President's Rule.

On the face of it, the demand does not hold water because if this criterion is to be applied, Bihar and some other North-eastern states will also have to be under Article 356. Ibobi is yet to get on to good governance. About 99,000 state employees have ceased work since the beginning of December demanding, among others, restoration of their right to withdraw from the GP Fund. There seems to be little the chief minister can do to improve the law and order situation with insurgents running a parallel administration. Rumbings in the Congress are over Ibobi holding two posts — he is also MPCC chief and must consider sticking to one. Meanwhile, the Centre should help ease the state's acute financial burden by waiving the Rs 400 crore overdraft, with a warning that it should maintain strict financial discipline.

6 JAN 2001



Tripura trumpets terror termination

Statesman News Services

AGARTALA, Jan. 5. — There is no permanent rebel camp in Tripura now, thanks to the integrated security plan devised to check rebellion, the police claim. The outlawed ultras, police said, are mainly operating from their bases in Bangladesh.

The DGP, Mr GM Shrivastav, said here that a move had been initiated to coordinate security activities through the state-level coordination committee when the operation groups both at the state and district levels were showing encouraging performance. An effective coordination of activities of the armed forces, including the Assam Rifles, the BSF, the CRPF and the Tripura State Rifles, could by now be achieved when the special area operations to combat insurgency had shown good results, he pointed out.

Mr Shrivastav said 55 insur-

gents and 39 security personnel were killed during the anti-insurgency operations in the state last year. Some 593 rebels and their collaborators were arrested and 66 arms seized during the period.

Meanwhile, the wide coverage on the Bangladesh Rifles' "restricted operation" against north-east ultras earlier given by some Dhaka newspapers has apparently left the authorities in a spot. The largely circulated Dhaka dailies, *Ittefaq* and *Jugantar*, reported on 3 January that 34 Ulfa members, including some of the outfit's frontliners, were arrested from the Mohammadpur, Green Road area and Gulshan in Dhaka on 2 January.

A group of aggrieved members of the outlawed All Tripura Tiger Force threw explosives at the outfit supremo, Mr Ranjit Devbarma's residence at Adabar in Dhaka, injuring eight ATTF men. Mr Devbarma and his wife received

minor injuries however. The Dhaka city police told newsmen that four persons were injured seriously in an explosion in the area that day. Police declined to divulge the identity of the injured.

The Ulfa leader, Mr Paresh Barua, has now been staying in a house at Dhanmondi, Dhaka. He keeps shifting almost every month.

Janakantha, another daily from Dhaka, has complained that the present government in Bangladesh is "soft" towards the north-east rebel outfits now camping in the country's territory. The newspaper said the Bangladesh Rifles had conducted a "restricted operation" to close down the NE rebel hideouts at Bandarban in Chittagong hills, Hobigonj, Jamalpur and Sherpur district areas early on 1 January.

Janakantha also reported that a legal forum, which enjoys the patronage of an influential minister, was trying to get several NE rebel

leaders, including the Ulfa leader, Mr Anup Chetia, and the All Tripura Tiger Force leader, Mr Sanjib Devbarma, who were earlier arrested by the Bangladesh police, released. New Delhi had earlier wanted Dhaka to arrange for the extradition of a total 88 NE rebel leaders and frontliners who were arrested there since 1997.

Though Mr Lutfujaman Babar, the Bangladesh minister of state for home, told the BBC that his government was not encouraging any of the rebel units, either of the country or from outside to indulge in violence.

The administration had denied reports earlier published by the Dhaka dailies regarding arrests of 34 Ulfa leaders and members in the capital. The reports were not correct, said a spokesman of the home ministry. Mr Babar, however, said the operation against the extremists would continue in the interest of the nation.