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Aasu wants J&K-like autonomy for Assam

29/19

Bikash Singh

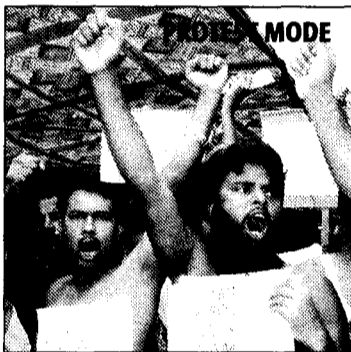
GUWAHATI 28 SEPTEMBER

ALL Assam Students Union (Aasu) has on Wednesday demanded a Jammu & Kashmir-like status for Assam. Aasu felt only such a status to Assam could provide safeguard to the indigenous people of Assam.

As per the sixth clause of the Assam Accord, signed by Aasu and the Centre in 1985, the Union government has agreed

to provide constitutional safeguard to the indigenous people of the state. The Aasu executive meeting held recently has resolved to pressurise the centre for implementing the clause six of the accord.

Aasu adviser, Samujjal Bhattacharyya said when the accord was signed, the Centre has agreed to give Assam constitutional safeguard. "We have accepted all those (foreigners) who came to Assam before 1971 as its citizen. We have taken the burden of



keeping all foreigners and the Centre has agreed to give us safeguards in lieu of our accepting its proposal of making 1971 as the cut-off date for determination of the foreigners," he said.

Bhattacharyya added the Centre should keep powers over issues like currency, foreign affairs and defence, transferring residuary powers must to Assam.

"The people of the state must have right over land and

resources. As many of the ethnic tribes and community are not represented in the lower house of the state legislature, Assam must have an upper house. There must be provisions for dual citizenship," he said.

The Aasu adviser pointed out that Assam requires this safeguards owing to the demographic invasion unleashed on it by illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

India's IAEA vote was decided in advance

In deciding to vote against Iran, India showed its foreign policy was not immune to outside pressure.

Amit Baruah

INDIA'S DECISION to vote against Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency's governing board meeting on Saturday was not taken overnight. As reported by *The Hindu* on September 17, India had already decided to vote with the European Union "three" and the United States at the IAEA in a crunch situation.

Whatever the justification extended by the Ministry of External Affairs on Saturday night about the Indian vote, the fact is that the India-U.S. civil nuclear deal has altered New Delhi's perception about Iran, with which it has cooperated significantly on Afghanistan. India, which has championed the non-aligned cause for long, did not find itself in the company of South Africa and Malaysia at the IAEA governing board meeting in Vienna. Nor did it find itself in the company of China and Russia, which, like South Africa and Malaysia, abstained from voting against the resolution sponsored by the EU-three.

According to the Malaysian representative on the IAEA board, the head of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) group, Ryma Jama' Hussein: "Due to the serious nature of the issues contained in the draft resolution, NAM had suggested that time and diplomacy be allowed for the matter to be deliberated at the November board meeting and for

negotiations to proceed with a view to reaching a consensus decision. However, NAM's major concerns and those of other like-minded states were not taken on board."

India itself cast a gravely qualified vote at the IAEA, revealing what a rhetorical tight-rope it has had to walk in recent weeks on the issue of Iran's nuclear programme.

"In our explanation of [the] vote, we have clearly expressed our opposition to Iran being declared as non-compliant with its safeguards agreements. Nor do we agree that the current situation could constitute a threat to international peace and security."

"Nevertheless, the resolution does not refer the matter to the Security Council and has agreed that outstanding issues be dealt with under the aegis of the IAEA itself. This is in line with our position and therefore, we have extended our support to it," the External Affairs Ministry spokesman said on Saturday night.

One can only wonder why India did not abstain from the vote at the meeting, like so many others did, when it had problems with the resolution. That would have been the honourable course to adopt.

What the IAEA resolution does now is to set the stage for referring Iran to the U.N. Security Council in future. It said it: "... finds also that the history of concealment of Iran's nuclear activities referred to in the Director

General's report, the nature of these activities, issues brought to light in the course of the Agency's verification of declarations made by Iran since September 2002 and the resulting absence of confidence that Iran's nuclear programme is exclusively for peaceful purposes have given rise to questions that are within the competence of the Security Council ..."

The External Affairs Ministry on Saturday also revealed for the first time that India was fully embroiled in the Iranian nuclear issue and its role was not confined to carrying messages. In such a situation, India and Indian diplomacy will be directly culpable for what the EU-3 and the U.S. might do with Iran in the future.

"It should also be borne in mind that India has all along been supportive of the EU-3 initiative to negotiate a fair and reasonable understanding with Iran on this issue. Our support to the resolution should also be seen against this background. We have been in close touch with the EU-3, and External Affairs Minister has himself been meeting with and talking to his French, German, and British counterparts regularly in the past couple of weeks, to try and encourage a consensus approach. Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh had discussed the matter with President Chirac in Paris ..." the Ministry spokesman said on record.

The advice tendered by the Prime Minister to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, during the course of a telephonic conversation on Friday, that Tehran should be flexible and make concessions also revealed the Indian Government's mind.

There seems little doubt that the civilian nuclear deal between India and the U.S. has begun taking a toll of New Delhi's "independent" foreign policy. While it is still in the form of a promise for Washington, India has already begun delivering its side of the deal.

After all, a "responsible" state such as India, which has dealings with the U.S. on civil nuclear issues, cannot take a different position on what still are only suspicions about Iran's nuclear programme.

U.S. Congressman Tom Lantos, in recent remarks before the House International Relations Committee, said India had to choose between the "ayatollahs" of terror in Tehran and the U.S. India's choice, in fact, was a different one: it was between an independent foreign policy and taking the line strongly suggested by the U.S. and its three European allies on Iran's nuclear programme.

On Saturday, in the IAEA board in Vienna, India failed to demonstrate that its foreign policy remained immune to outside pressure.

10-11-269

NLFT guns down eight in Tripura

AGARTALA, Sept. 25. — In a planned manoeuvre, suspected NLFT insurgents attacked a few houses, killing eight people, including four women and two children, and simultaneously assaulted a Special Police Officers' camp in Brindabanghat in West Tripura district to keep them engaged. The insurgents first attacked a SPO camp in the area and exchanged a few rounds of fire with the personnel, police said. Another group encircled three houses isolated from the rest of the village and fired at their residents, killing seven of them on the spot and injuring three others. One of the injured died at Agartala Medical College.

A centurion, Premadam-oyee Debnath (102), was among the dead. Among the other persons killed were Amulya Debnath, Amar Chan Debnath, Aurobindo Debnath (4), Nirodh Debnath, Fulkumari Debnath, Niva Debnath and Chapala Debnath. — PTI



Bullet-riddled bodies lie on the compound of a hospital in Kalyanpur, 70 km east of Agartala, on Sunday. — Eastern Projections

Ulfa ultras trigger panic on flight

Two arrested in Jaipur

Sept. 25. — An Air Deccan flight was delayed for over an hour due to two Ulfa militants yesterday. Though they were in police custody, their mere presence created panic amongst the airline staff and other passengers. They refused to take off with the mili-

tants on board. The Ulfa militants — Biju Chakravarty (36) and his wife Reeta (26) — were arrested by Jaipur Police on 19 September. Assam Police was taking them to Guwahati for questioning.

Air Deccan sources said the tickets for the militants were booked on its Jaipur-Delhi flight without informing them about their background. "In such cases,

clearance from the bureau of civil aviation security is mandatory which was not taken in his case," An Air Deccan official said. It was only after the militants boarded the 6.40 a.m. flight under police protection that the crew got suspicious about the couple. When it was established that they were militants, the staff and crew pressed the panic button. They refused to

take off till both were asked to get down from the 48-seater plane. As news spread, other passengers panicked too and refused to travel in the plane with the ultras on board. The CISF, looking after security at the airport, and policemen argued in favour of allowing the ultras on board. But it was only after the militants were taken off the plane that the flight took off for Delhi.

Regional planning & NEC

By Rangan Dutta

The North Eastern Council (NEC) was set up in August 1972 as an advisory body empowered to discuss matters of common interest to the Centre and the northeastern states. It recommends to the Union and state governments any matter of common interest, inter alia, in the fields of economic and social planning, including inter-state transport and communications, power and flood control.

But for the sake of balanced development, the NEC's mandate and character has changed: it is now the regional planning body and will formulate for member-states a regional plan with regard to matters of common importance to more than one state of the region and indicate priorities of projects/schemes included in the plan and the location.

This was how the Planning Commission defined its role in the Tenth Plan. There was more than just regional planning when it was constituted.

BS Sarao, the first planning adviser to the council, once said the idea of a political and planning forum within the region emerged after the reorganisation of the North-east in 1956 when BK Nehru, the then governor of the northeastern states and NEC's first chairman, felt that the chief ministers of the region needed to meet more often within the region to discuss common concerns of security and development.

The astute diplomat that he was, Mr Nehru had foreseen the intra-regional and inter-state tensions and the need for a consultative mechanism. The NEC has served this role admirably and even as a lobby for projects of regional importance.

After all, if all seven chief ministers jointly demanded a vital bridge or highway, the Centre could ill afford to ignore such demands. The NEC Act envisaged a security role for the council, as it was to review law and order and the security situation of the region. Though the director-general, Assam Rifles used to sit in the council meeting as security adviser, it was always a low-key presence since the second NEC chairman, LP Singh made it clear that it would not be a useful activity. With the establishment of the ministry for development of NE (DONER), the transfer of NEC from the home ministry to DONER and the recent creation of a

high-level Planning Group within the NEC, the focus is now on regional planning.

One would naturally expect a larger, more intensive and interactive regional planning under the aegis of the NEC. This is not happening. The agreed Tenth Plan outlay of the NEC is Rs 3,500 crore, a small amount when one notes that the total Tenth Plan outlay of eight states including Sikkim is about Rs 28,698 crore and outlay of Arunachal Pradesh is Rs 3,888 crore.

Could the NEC Plan act as a catalyst in restructuring moribund economies of the northeastern states is a legitimate question, especially when the Ninth Plan expenditure of the NEC was Rs 1,945 crore.

A study of the 2004-2005 NEC Annual Plan shows that there are about 100 projects under 10 broad sectors for which Rs 500 crore was provided by the Centre and nearly 80 per cent of the outlay was meant for transport and power development. The NEC gets its funds from the total kitty of Central assistance for plans of states and Union Territories in the Central budget which amounts to nibbling

Open Forum



from what is earmarked for states and not adding to it. The proportion of NEC funds that goes to Central agencies for implementation of power, railways, roads and civil aviation projects augments the budget of these bodies.

NEC funds are similarly provided to member-states.

Since provisioning and transfer of these funds involve a complicated and time-consuming process, the small NEC secretariat is usually tied up with this work and thus NEC is being seen mainly as a funding agency; its planning priorities and schemes apparently having been set.

This is not to underestimate its impressive work in the health sector in creating and supporting 22 institutions and nine projects in manpower development which facilitated capacity building in medical and technical manpower. Similar is the case in water management, horticulture and agriculture, disaster preparedness, promotion of industries and trade, preservation of bio-diversity, besides application of remote sensing to community resource management.

The NEC Plan contains strong initiatives and will strengthen development infrastructure.

Despite these positive features, looking at the totality of the efforts, one gets a nagging feeling that all these would not create a critical mass for development. Several reasons can be cited. First, the meagre outlay and the list of

incomplete schemes. Second, the lengthening shadow of adverse credit deposit ratio reflecting that the region's savings are not invested within; capital formed is not being put to generate wealth; the NEC has to address this issue as institutional finance for individual entrepreneurial activity is the core of market-led development and this cannot be left to an organisation such as the North East Development Finance Corporation alone. Expertise of the level required for these initiatives is not seen in the NEC. This must be created.

Third, its role in urban development is still to be seen and is confined to a few schemes such as setting up of inter-state bus terminals. No city in the North-east has any civic infrastructure worth the name. This provides scope for planned development of towns and cities as wealth and employment generation activities on the lines of the southern states and could kick-start development of the tertiary sector and free the state economies of their dependence on low-yielding, flood-and-erosion-prone agriculture.

The setting up of an IT park or a biotech park without the backup of urban development cannot ensure quick-spread effects. Fourth, the North-east is still to get any sizeable foreign direct investment or external aid for socio-economic development.

NEC as a wing of the Central government could have a promotional and advocacy role in this field by making NE states and nodal Central agencies responsible for attracting FDI together and hard-selling investment potential of the region to foreign countries and East Asian economies. The NEC has to create capacity for such initiatives.

Fifth, and the most glaring weakness in NEC planning is its inadequate science and technology component. The Annual Plan 2004-05 provided only Rs14.50 crore under Science and Technology. Part of the problem has been the absence of a distinguished scientist or engineer in the NEC planning group capable of integrating S&T inputs into the NEC planning and assisting the states in applying technologies already developed.

Sixth, its development research needs a fresh look. It is not enough to prepare state development reports suggesting more outlay; rather, issues like why some states are not growing despite huge expenditure and availability of technologies deserve serious multidisciplinary scrutiny and resultant efforts towards building of growth-inducing institutions.

To accomplish this, DONER must consider a radical change: relocating from New Delhi's Vigyan Bhawan to the North-east. If the Atomic Energy Commission and Department of Atomic Energy could work together in Mumbai, NEC and DONER could do the same.

(The author is a scientific consultant in the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India.)

Ulfa moves, confusion reigns

By **Enay Sankar Bora**

Since the day the banned United Liberation Front of Assam announced the formation of a 11-member People's Consultative Group comprising known sympathisers earlier this month, confusion has reigned in Assam about the fate of the peace ini-

tiative begun by litterateur Indira (Mamoni Raisom) Goswami earlier this year.

The PCG's formation is seen as an Ulfa ploy to regain its foothold among the people through mobilisation of public opinion on the peace initiative. Yet, related developments do not appear to be moving in any particular

direction. While Dr Goswami claimed on the very day that Ulfa announced its consultative group that the response from the Prime Minister's Office was positive and a meeting with PMO representatives could be held in October, the Army launched counter-insurgency strikes to dislodge militant bases inside

the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park in Tinsukia district.

The timing raised questions because it appeared to fall into a home ministry strategy, one issue was why was it launched at the time of the peace talks offering? A second is that the presence of the militants at the sanctuary was reported earlier this summer by local residents: why did the government not move at the time? The home and defence ministries have shown scant respect to the Ulfa move and security officials say that the PCG does not reflect Ulfa's sincerity about settling issues through negotiation, but represented a hurriedly hatched design to build public pressure to stall the Army offensive to haul out cornered leaders of its 28th battalion inside the national park.

"It seems that they are not there any longer," said a senior security official in New Delhi, after confirming on Thursday night that the Army chief and local officials were asked to close the operation. There was a violent, public protest in front of the deputy commissioner's office in Tinsukia on Thursday against the Army operations.

The agitators also demanded that the government recognise the PCG at the earliest as the authorised facilitator of peace talks. It shows the Ulfa sympathisers' plan to get the Army off the organisation's back, especially after the killing of a few of its cadres including a leader of the 28th battalion which was responsible for numerous attacks in Upper Assam. The government should understand that more such organised demonstrations against the Army operation at this juncture could strengthen the Ulfa, vis-a-vis the peace initiative. The change in position came after a tough stand by defence minister Pranab Mukherjee's statement. He said there was no question of the Army going soft on its operations against Ulfa. Mr Mukherjee said there was no question of halting the Army operation as there was no ceasefire pact in place with the group and that "individualistic" proposals to hold dialogue with the banned outfit could not facilitate ceasefire for which ground rules have to be framed.

Tarun Gogoi's government has been a helpless spectator. Mr Gogoi cut a sorry figure

when he admitted to the media that his government was yet to receive details about the Army operations inside Dibru-Saikhowa National Park - although under the Unified Command system which rules in Assam, there must be close coordination between the Army and the civil administration. He pleaded that ongoing efforts to bring the Ulfa to the negotiation table must continue despite the Army offensive which has been routine in the state. He added to the confusion by disclosing that he had only read about the PCG in newspapers and was yet to receive any communication either from the Ulfa or the Centre.

But who is talking about peace? This must be clarified beyond the present mess. And the sooner it happens, the better it will be for the state and its people sandwiched between the Army and Ulfa. The militants must not get an opportunity to blame the government for derailing the nascent peace initiative.

(The author is The Statesman's Guwahati-based Special Representative.)



Bodies of top Ulfa leader Achinta Saikia and Jahnabi Gogoi who were killed in encounter with security forces during the ongoing operations against the banned outfit in Dibru-Saikhowa National Park in Assam. — Eastern Projections

No ceasefire without ground rules: Pranab

"Government cannot respond to individual requests"

Sandeep Dikshit

RANGIYA (ASSAM): Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee on Thursday said that while initiatives for a ceasefire with the United Liberation Front of Assam were welcome, they should be backed by credible solutions.

"No decision has been taken for a ceasefire. Ground rules have to be prepared. It is just not possible for the Government to respond to individual requests," Mr. Mukherjee told presspersons on the last leg of his tour to the north-east. "Individual initiatives are welcome if they create an atmosphere conducive [for talks]. But it is very plain and simple: unless the ground rules are prepared, ceasefire cannot be implemented."

- Initiatives for truce must be backed by credible solutions
- Any initiative should be discussed with the State and Central Governments
- Blockade of the Saikhowa reserve forests not meant to cause hardship

The questions were put in the context of a civil society organisation seeking a ceasefire with the ULFA so that the Army could lift a three-week siege of a national park in the State.

Indira Goswami, litterateur, had also earlier sought the suspension of hostilities between the ULFA and the Army.

Asked whether he would like to take the initiative for concluding a ceasefire with the UL-

FA, Mr. Mukherjee said: "It's not my job. I was asked to conduct anti-insurgency operations. This should be discussed with the State Government and the Union Home Minister."

On the military blockade of the Saikhowa reserve forests, he said the people were put to some inconvenience but the intention was not to put them to hardship.

Media reports had claimed

that thousands of people living in the forest reserve suffered because of the blockade.

The Army, on the other hand, said that three militants were killed and "war-like" stores recovered from two camps.

Mr. Mukherjee was flanked by the Chief of the Army Staff, J.J. Singh, and the General Officer Commanding of the 4 Corps, H.S. Lidder.

Army denies report

The Army came out with a strongly worded statement, blaming the ULFA for "extortion, killings and kidnappings." It also denied media reports that the security forces had killed 12 ULFA activists during the siege.

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23 SEP 2006

RE HINDU

উত্তর-পূর্বে জঙ্গি দমনে বিষে বিষক্ষয় নীতি নিতে চায় কেন্দ্র

অগ্নি রায় ● লেইমাখং
(মণিপুর)

২১ সেপ্টেম্বর: কাঁটা দিয়ে কাঁটা
তোলা।

উত্তর-পূর্বের জঙ্গি সমস্যা বাগে
আনতে সম্প্রতি এই কৌশল নিয়েছে
কেন্দ্র। চলতি সফরের দ্বিতীয় দিন
প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায়
জানালেন, মণিপুরের নীতি জঙ্গি
গোষ্ঠীর সঙ্গে সেনা অভিযান বন্ধ করার
চুক্তিতে পৌঁছানো গিয়েছে। সেনাদের
উদ্দেশ্যে তাঁর নির্দেশ, “যাঁরা এই চুক্তির
মধ্যে এসেছেন তাঁদের মদত নিয়ে অন্য
জঙ্গিদের গতিবিধি দমন করুন।”

অন্তত ৩৫টি ছোট বড় জঙ্গি
সংগঠন ডালপালা ছড়িয়ে রয়েছে
স্বাধীন মণিপুরের দাবি নিয়ে।
সৌন্দর্যের পাশে সন্ত্রাসের এই
সহাবস্থান কাশ্মীর ছাড়া বিরল। আজ
সেই মণিপুরের চোখ জুড়ানো সেনা
ঘাঁটি লেইমাখঙে (ইফল থেকে ৩০
কিলোমিটার) চড়া সুরে জঙ্গি দমনের
ডাক দিয়েছেন প্রণব।

ঘরের মধ্যে নাশকতা সামলানোর
পাশাপাশি প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী একই রকম
চড়া স্বরে ‘প্রতিবেশী’ দেশগুলিকেও
হুঁশিয়ারি দিতে ছাড়েননি। বাঙ্গালোরের
মস্তব্যের প্রতিধ্বনি করে আজ প্রণব
বলেছেন, “চিন ও পাকিস্তানের সঙ্গে
সম্পর্ক ভাল করার নিরন্তর চেষ্টা

চালাচ্ছি। ভারত কখনও তাঁদের কাঁকা
চোখে দেখে না। কিন্তু তার সঙ্গে এটাও
স্পষ্ট করে দিতে চাই, আমাদের এক
ইঞ্চি জমিতেও কাউকে কুনজর দিতে
দেব না।” জাতীয় নিরাপত্তা উপদেষ্টা
এম কে নারায়ণনের চিন সফরের
আগে, উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলের জমিতে
দাঁড়িয়ে চিন সম্পর্কে এই মন্তব্য
কুটনৈতিক দিক থেকে তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ
বলেই মনে করা হচ্ছে। চিনের সঙ্গে
সীমান্ত বিবাদ মেটানোর প্রয়াসের
পাশাপাশিই সেনা মনোবল চাঙ্গা
করারও এটা একটা কৌশল।

নাগাল্যান্ডে কাল যে আপাত শান্তি
দেখে এসেছি, মণিপুরে দেখলাম তাতে
অহরহ এ কে-৪৭-এর খোঁচা। দু’দিন
আগে চূড়চাঁদপুরের জঙ্গি সংঘর্ষের
জনাই বোধহয় সেনা-নিরাপত্তা প্রবল।
সেনা প্রধান জে জে সিংহের বক্তব্য,
“বছ দিন পরে জঙ্গিরা সুযোগ পেয়ে
আঘাত হেনেছে। আমরাও নজরদারি
কড়া করছি।” ইফল বিমানবন্দর থেকে
লেইমাখং পর্যন্ত গোটা রাস্তা সেনা
এসকর্ট করল। দু’পাশের আদিগন্ত
মখমল সবুজ ক্ষেতে মতো স্থাণু হয়ে
দাঁড়ানো সেনার মিছিল।

মণিপুরের প্রধান জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠী ইউ
এন এল এফ (ইউনাইটেড ন্যাশনাল
লিবারেশন ফ্রন্ট) এবং পি এল এ
(পিপলস লিবারেশন আর্মি)-র মূল
দাবি, স্বাধীন মণিপুরের প্রশ্নে গণ ভোট

হোক, রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের শান্তিরক্ষা বাহিনী
উপস্থিতিতে। মণিপুরের মানুষই ঠিক
করুন, তাঁরা কী চান। প্রণববাবু অব
সায় জানিয়ে দেন, “এই ধরনের কিছু
আদৌ সম্ভব নয়।”

মুইভার সঙ্গে শান্তি আলোচনা
নিয়েও উদ্বিগ্ন রয়েছে মণিপুরের
মানুষের। কারণ, মুইভারা যে সার্বভৌম
নাগাল্যান্ডের দাবি তুলেছেন, তাতে
মণিপুরের এলাকাও চলে যেতে পারে
বলে আশঙ্কা। গত বছর প্রধানমন্ত্রী
মনমোহন সিংহের সঙ্গে ইফলে এসে
যে অসন্তোষ দেখেছিলাম, তা এখনও
দেখলাম একই রকম। সশস্ত্র বাহিনীর
বিশেষ ক্ষমতা আইন বিলোপের
দাবিতে ইফল এখনও সরব।

প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রীর বক্তব্য, “নাগাদের
নিজস্ব বাধ্যবাধকতা রয়েছে। আমরা
তাদের সঙ্গে আপাতত সংঘর্ষবিরতি
করেছি। সমস্যাগুলি চার-পাঁচ দশকের
পুরনো। সময় তো লাগবেই।”

সফর শেষের মুখে অবশ্য
অনেকটাই আশার আলো দেখছেন
প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী। বক্তৃতায় বললেন,
“আগে দক্ষিণ মণিপুরের জেলাগুলো
জঙ্গিরা কজা করে রেখেছিল। একে
ওরা মুক্তাঞ্চল বলত। আপনাদের
চেষ্টায় ওদের হটানো গিয়েছে।”
কর্মসংস্থান বাড়াতে স্থানীয় যুবকদের
সেনাবাহিনীতে নেওয়ার সিদ্ধান্তও
ঘোষিত হল আজ।

North east state

Manipur was consulted before Army signed accords: Pranab

"Our job is to help and not substitute the State Government"

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Sandeep Dikshit

LEIMAKHONG (MANIPUR): Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee on Wednesday said the Manipur Government was consulted before the Army signed agreements with several militant organisations to suspend operations against them.

"Of course, the State Government was taken into confidence. Our job is to help and not substitute the State Government. If the State Government can manage the situation, there was no need to deploy the armed forces," he told newsmen shortly after addressing troops on his first visit to major Army formations in the North-East.

The Minister blamed the civil authorities for not wrapping up the probe into the alleged rape and murder of Thangjam Manorama Devi. He said the Army had offered to conduct DNA tests for all the men involved in the operation to arrest Manorama Devi. But the civilian authorities were unable to crucial evidence for testing.

"As a result the investigations have not been completed," he said.

Mr. Mukherjee said the armed forces would step up recruitment from the North-Eastern States and the Government was considering enrolling women from Manipur.

Earlier, addressing troops who guard the border with China and other countries, he said the Government was moving forward to normalise ties with both Pakistan and China but "wanted to make clear that no country would be allowed to covet even an inch of Indian territory."

Mr. Mukherjee made the observation a day before his visit to forward posts in Tawang sector in Arunachal Pradesh, an area claimed by China.



FIRST VISIT: Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee addresses the troops in Manipur on Wednesday. - PHOTO: PTI

NORTH-EAST ■ Maintains silence on Army operations against ULFA in Assam's Tinsukia forest

Pranab hints at extending Naga truce

SHIV AROOR
DIMPUR, SEPTEMBER 20

ARRIVING in the region today for the first time since he took over as Defence Minister, Pranab Mukherjee opened his two-day tour by hinting that the ceasefire with NSCN (IM) may be extended beyond the agreed six months. He, however, maintained silence on the ongoing operations against the ULFA in Assam's Tinsukia forests.

Admitting that the North-East issue was "complex, with no readymade solutions", Mukherjee said: "There is a groundswell of encouragement among the local populace for peace and development. The environment is conducive to some sort of set-



Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee walks up the Embraer 135 BJ (Legacy) jet in New Delhi on Tuesday. P71

tlement, though it is impossible to put a timeframe for any such milestone. The fact that the ceasefire (with the NSCN I-M) was brought down from one year to six months does not imply that it will not be extended at the end of the six

months." Side-stepping questions on the Army operations against the ULFA, he said, "There is no ceasefire with the ULFA so far, so it is premature to comment. We are looking at larger political consensus for politi-

11 Army jawans killed in Manipur ambush

► **IMPHAL:** 11 Indian Army jawans were killed and six others injured, when members of the insurgent group Kanglief Yawoi Kanna Lup (KYKL) opened small arms fire on them in an ambush on Monday evening. Lt Col S D Goswami, PRO (DWM), Imphal, told *The Indian Express* that earlier reports of 14 Army personnel being killed in the ambush were incorrect. Confirming the number of soldiers killed as 11, Goswami said all the Armymen belonged to 5 Gorkha Rifles.

"The ambush took place at Upper Ngarian in Bishenpur district (about 45 km from Imphal). The jawans — a vehicle-based patrol — were returning from their patrol when the insurgents attacked. It was a perfect ambush site," Goswami said. The attack, he added, occurred at around 7.30 pm on Monday.

In another incident, an Assam Rifles jawan was killed in an insurgent attack near Jiribam on the Manipur-Assam border. Later, militant outfit PLA claimed responsibility for the attack. Goswami said the jawan was killed by an IED that had been electronically detonated. —*ENS*

Assam.

Mukherjee will visit Leimakhong in Manipur on Wednesday, headquarters of the Army's 57 Mountain Division. "The situation in Manipur is bad, there is no doubt. If it was good or normal, we would not need to deploy Army there. But there have been perceptible improvements," he said.

Earlier, while speaking to reporters on his special aircraft from the Capital to Kolkata this morning, Mukherjee said: "The incident which took place in Churachandpur, where suspected militants, most likely of the PLA engaged in some action seems to be them sending a signal ahead of my visit. But I am here to visit troops in all forward areas and review the overall security situation."

cal dialogue with all groups," all and I, as Defence Minister, On the Naga issue, have assured full support from Mukherjee said: "There are my side," he said.

groups with divergent interests. This is what makes the accompanying the Defence Minister on his tour here to Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and

"Solution to Naga issue not now"

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Pranab visits North-East

2119

Sandeep Dikshit

DIMAPUR: Expressing satisfaction with the continuing dialogue with insurgent Naga groups, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee cautioned against expectations of immediate solutions because of the complexity of the problem.

On his first visit to the north-east after taking over as Defence Minister, Mr. Mukherjee accepted that though the ceasefire with the main Naga insurgent group was extended by six months as compared to one year earlier, "it does not mean that it won't be extended by another six months." Pointing out that dialogue with the Naga Socialist Council of Nagaland (Issac Mui-vah) itself was a positive development, the Minister said it was pressure from the people that helped create a conducive atmosphere for some development. "But is not possible to say what form it would take," he told newsmen shortly after being briefed about the situation by the Army's Eastern Command in Kolkata and a little later by the 3 Corps here in Nagaland.

Appeal to factions

The Minister took note of the sentiments expressed by the civil society organisation, the Consultative Committee for Peace, which met at the Nagaland Chief Minister, Neiphiu Rio's residence. Besides appealing to all Naga underground factions to abide by the ceasefire ground rules, he urged the Government to expedite the dialogue process. At the same time he pointed out

• Pressure from people helped create conducive atmosphere

• Situation in Manipur bad

that due to the complexity of the problem, the aim was to arrive at an acceptable solution to all parties.

Although Mr. Mukherjee was positive about the dialogue process with NSCN (I-M), he described the situation in Manipur as "bad." "We are trying to normalise the situation. Some improvement has taken place." But the difficulty was that the divergence of opinion among the various insurgent groups made the situation "complex." On the United Liberation front of Assam's (ULFA) demand to halt Army operations in Assam, he said the demand from the people for a dialogue was an "encouraging development" but as there was no formal dialogue with this militant outfit, "it would be premature to make any comment."

Mr. Mukherjee is on an intensive tour to most major Army formations spearheading the anti-insurgency operations and guarding the border. On Wednesday, he will leave for Leimakhong in Manipur and address Army personnel. He will also meet senior officials of Assam Rifles, a specialised counter-insurgency force under the Army's command. On the same day, he will leave for Aizawal where he will inaugurate a recruiting office followed by a visit to Tezpur where the chief of the 4 Corps will brief him about the security situation.

দিন্মির আশ্বাসে বেঠকের প্রস্তুতি চালাবে আলফা

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, গুয়াহাটী, ১৫ সেপ্টেম্বর: ২৪ ঘণ্টার টানটান উত্তেজনার পরে বরফ গলে জল হল। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দফতর থেকে অসমের ডিব্ৰু-শইখোয়ার জাতীয় উদ্যানে সেনা-অভিযান বন্ধ রাখার প্রতিশ্রুতি পেয়ে কেন্দ্র-আলফা শান্তি আলোচনার প্রক্রিয়া ফের শুরু করল জন উপদেষ্টা কমিটি (পিসিজি)।

শইখোয়ার জঙ্গলে সেনাদের হাতে ১২ জন জঙ্গি-হত্যার অভিযোগ এনে কাল আলফা এবং পিসিজি পৃথক বিবৃতি দিয়ে জানিয়ে দিয়েছিল, সেনারা একতরফা আক্রমণ বন্ধ না করলে আলোচনার সব পথ বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হবে। আলফার কমান্ডার-ইন-চিফ পরেশ বরুয়া জঙ্গি ক্যাডারদের পাল্টা আঘাত হানার নির্দেশও দিয়েছিলেন। এই নিয়ে অসমে তীব্র প্রতিক্রিয়ার সৃষ্টি হওয়ায় প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দফতর থেকে আজ সকালে সেনা অভিযান বন্ধ রাখার প্রতিশ্রুতি দেওয়া হয়। পিসিজি-র মুখপাত্র লাচিত বরদলৈ বলেন, “প্রধানমন্ত্রীর অফিসের প্রতিশ্রুতিতে আমরা সন্তুষ্ট। তাই শান্তি আলোচনার প্রক্রিয়া বন্ধ করার প্রস্তাব উঠছে না।”

সেনাবাহিনী অবশ্য আজও ১২ জন জঙ্গি হত্যার খবর জোরালো ভাবে অস্বীকার করেছে। তাদের পাল্টা অভিযোগ, জঙ্গলের ভিতরে আশ্রয় নেওয়া আলফা নেতাদের পালাবার পথ করে দিতেই ‘কৌশল’ হিসাবে হত্যাকাণ্ডের খবর রটানো হচ্ছে। এক সেনা-মুখপাত্র জানান, আলফার ২৮ নম্বর ব্যাটেলিয়ানের জিতেন দত্তর নেতৃত্বে ২০ জনের একটি দল জঙ্গলে আশ্রয় নিয়েছে। জওয়ানেরা সেই খবর পেয়ে চারদিক ঘিরে ফেলায় জঙ্গিদের মুক্ত করতে পাল্টা চাপের কৌশল নিয়েছে আলফা। মুখপাত্রটি জানান, অভিযান বন্ধের কোনও নির্দেশ এখনও কেন্দ্রের কাছ থেকে আসেনি।

কিন্তু চার জনের নাম-সহ ১২ জন জঙ্গি হত্যাকাণ্ডের নিশ্চিত খবর দিয়ে পরেশ বরুয়া পাল্টা আক্রমণের কথা ঘোষণা করতেই আজ সকাল থেকে ওই জঙ্গলে আর মর্টার, গুলির আওয়াজ শোনা যায়নি বলে দাবি পিসিজি-র। দুপুরে কমিটির এক সদস্যকে ফোন করে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর অফিস থেকে সেনা অভিযান বন্ধ রাখার কথা জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়। কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার এ ব্যাপারে কোনও আনুষ্ঠানিক ঘোষণা না করলেও শান্তি আলোচনার প্রক্রিয়া চালিয়ে যাওয়া হবে বলে পিসিজি সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে। লাচিত বলেন, “অভিযান বন্ধের কথা আমাদের জানানোয় আর বাধা থাকছে না। তবে ভবিষ্যতে আবার এমন হলে আলোচনা বন্ধ হতে পারে।”

কেন্দ্রের সঙ্গে আলোচনা শুরুর সম্ভাবনা খতিয়ে দেখতে আলফার পিসিজি গঠনের সিদ্ধান্তের পরে এমন একটা ধারণা অসম জুড়ে তৈরি হয়েছে যে, দু’পক্ষের মধ্যে আনুষ্ঠানিক ভাবে অস্ত্র-বিরতি চুক্তি না হলেও ‘অলিখিত ভাবে’ লড়াই বন্ধ থাকবে। আলফা, পিসিজি, অথবা ইন্দিরা গোস্বামীর দাবি, জঙ্গিরা এই সময় চুপ থাকলেও রাজ্যের ডিজি-র উস্কানিমূলক কথাবার্তা ও সেনাদের অভিযান বন্ধ হয়নি। ইন্দিরাদেবীও অভিযোগ, “ওই জঙ্গলে আলফার ছেলেরা অনেক দিন ধরেই শিবির করে আছে। অথচ অভিযান চালানোর জন্য এই সময়টাকেই বেছে নেওয়া হল। উদ্দেশ্য, শান্তি আলোচনাকে বিঘ্ন ঘটানো।”

কাল আলফা আলোচনা বন্ধ করে দেওয়ার হুমকি দিতেই কেন্দ্রের মতো রাজ্য সরকারও নড়েচড়ে বসে। স্বয়ং মুখ্যমন্ত্রী কথা বলেন প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র সফরে থাকা জাতীয় নিরাপত্তা উপদেষ্টা এম কে নারায়ণনের সঙ্গে। ইন্দিরাদেবীও কথা বলেন অসমের রাজ্যপাল অজয় সিংহের সঙ্গে। পিসিজি-র সঙ্গেও রাজ্য সরকারের কথা হয়। শেষ পর্যন্ত সমাধান সূত্র বেরিয়ে আসায় আজ সব মহল থেকে স্বস্তি প্রকাশ করা হয়েছে।

15 SEP 2009

ANANDABARAN LINGGA

বৈঠকের জন্য প্রতিনিধিদের নাম জানিয়ে দিলেন আলফা নেতা

রঞ্জন সেনগুপ্ত • গুয়াহাটি

৮ সেপ্টেম্বর: জাতীয় নিরাপত্তা উপদেষ্টা এম কে নারায়ণনের কাছ থেকে অক্টোবরের প্রথম সপ্তাহে আলোচনায় বসার ইঙ্গিত মেলায় আজ ই-মেলে ৯ সদস্যের প্রতিনিধি দলের নাম জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন আলফা সভাপতি অরবিন্দ রাজখোয়া। প্রতিনিধি দলের নাম দেওয়া হয়েছে 'পিপলস কনসালটেটিভ গ্রুপ'।

দলে রয়েছেন— ইঞ্জিনিয়ার মুকুল মহন্ত, সাংবাদিক অজিত ভূইঞা, হাইদার হুসেন ও দিগন্ত কোঁয়র, চিকিৎসক ব্রজেন গগৈ, অসম জাতীয়তাবাদী যুব-ছাত্র পরিষদের উপদেষ্টা দিলীপ পাটগিরি, মানবাধিকার সংগ্রাম সমিতির উপদেষ্টা লাচিত বরদলৈ, ক্রীড়া সংগঠক হিরণ্য শইকিয়া ও আইনজীবী অরুণ বরবরা। রাজখোয়া জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, ইন্দিরা গোস্বামী ও প্রাক্তন ফুটবলার রেবতী ফুকন কেন্দ্রের সঙ্গে পিপলস কনসালটেটিভ গ্রুপের 'যোগাযোগকারী' হিসাবে কাজ করবেন।

দিল্লি থেকে মধ্যস্থতাকারী ইন্দিরা গোস্বামী জানান, আলফা নেতার দেওয়া প্রতিনিধিদলের তালিকা ও তাঁদের পরিচয় তিনি নারায়ণনের হাতে তুলে দেবেন। তারপরেই কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার বৈঠকের দিনক্ষণ স্থির করবে।

পরে বরুয়াদের ঠিক করে দেওয়া নয় সদস্যের প্রতিনিধি দল অক্টোবরের প্রথম সপ্তাহে দিল্লি গিয়ে কেন্দ্রের সঙ্গে কি আলোচনা করবে? দলের এক প্রতিনিধি জানান, প্রথমত, আলফার

শীর্ষ নেতৃত্বের সঙ্গে দিল্লির আলোচনা শুরুর আগে কেন্দ্র-প্রতিনিধি দলের বৈঠকে 'গ্রাউন্ড রুল' তৈরি করার চেষ্টা হবে। এক কথায়, শীর্ষ বৈঠকে আলোচনার বিষয়সূচি ঠিক করার চেষ্টা হবে। দ্বিতীয়ত, আলফা কেন সার্বভৌমত্বের দাবি তুলছে, সেই কথাটা কেন্দ্রকে বুঝিয়ে বলার চেষ্টা হবে। অর্থাৎ, আলফার কাছে থেকে তাদের সার্বভৌমত্বের ব্যাখ্যা শোনার জন্য কেন্দ্রকে বলবে কমিটি। ওই প্রতিনিধির মন্তব্য, "সার্বভৌমত্বের দাবি মানা, আর তাই নিয়ে আলোচনা করা এক কথা নয়।"

২৭ বছর লড়াই করার পরে প্রাক-শর্ত ছাড়া আলোচনার প্রস্তাব দিয়েও কেন্দ্র জঙ্গি নেতারা নিজেরা আলোচনায় থাকছেন না, সেই প্রশ্ন হাঙ্কা করে হলেও উঠতে শুরু করেছে। এ সম্পর্কে আলফার ব্যাখ্যা হল, প্রথমত, জঙ্গি-সরকার আলোচনায় তার অগ্রগতি নিয়ে জনগণের মধ্যে একটা দায়সারা মনোভাব থাকে।

এ ক্ষেত্রে সমাজের বিভিন্ন অংশের প্রতিনিধিরা আলোচনায় অংশ নেওয়ায় তার সাফল্য-ব্যর্থতার প্রভাব পড়বে সমাজে। আলোচনা ব্যর্থ হলে সমাজে প্রতিক্রিয়া হবে। দ্বিতীয়ত, জঙ্গি-সরকারের আলোচনায় অধিকাংশ ক্ষেত্রে কেন্দ্রের তরফে জোর খাটিয়ে, অথবা 'ম্যানেজ' করে ধামাচাপা দেওয়ার চেষ্টা হয়। এ ক্ষেত্রে তা একেবারেই সম্ভব হবে না।

আলফার এক তরফা উদ্যোগকে 'স্বাগত' জানিয়েছেন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী তরুণ গগৈ। আজ তিনি বলেন, "দুই তরফের আলোচনা শুরু হবে, এটা খুবই

আনন্দের কথা।" কিন্তু জঙ্গি নেতারা তো কেউ থাকছেন না? জবাবে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বলেন, "আলফা কাকে পাঠাবে, না পাঠাবে সেটা ওদের ব্যাপার। ওরাই নিশ্চয়ই আলফার দাবির কথা কেন্দ্রের কাছে বলবে।"

মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর মতোই খুশি বিজেপি এবং সিপিএমও। বিজেপি-র রাজ্য সভাপতি ইন্দ্রমণি বোরা বলেন, "অসমের শান্তির জন্য এই উদ্যোগকে আমরা স্বাগত জানাচ্ছি। আলফার দিক থেকে এটি শুরু হওয়ায় তাদের অভিনন্দন।"

সিপিএম-এর রাজ্য সম্পাদক উদ্ধব বর্মণ বলেছেন, "আমরা সবসময়ই নিঃশর্ত আলোচনাই চেয়েছি। সেটি হচ্ছে কি না জানি না। তবে এই উদ্যোগকে স্বাগত।"

আলোচনায় আলফার তরফে কারা থাকছেন, সেটা বিবেচ্য বিষয় নয় বলে জানিয়ে বর্মণ বলেন, "আলফা প্রতিনিধি নির্বাচন করলে কারও আপত্তি থাকার কথা নয়।"

অস্ত্র ছেড়ে শান্তি আলোচনা শুরু করার ব্যাপারে যাদের আন্তরিকতা ও সদিচ্ছা নিয়ে প্রশ্ন ছিল গতকাল পর্যন্তও, আজ সকাল থেকেই সেই ধারণা পাল্টে খুশির হাওয়া বইতে শুরু করেছে 'বনধ'-এর অসমে। পরেশ বরুয়ার অপ্রত্যাশিত প্রস্তাব আলফার সদিচ্ছা প্রমাণে কেন্দ্রকে এক ধাপ পিছনে ফেলে দিল বলে অনেকের অভিমত। এমনকী নিষিদ্ধ জঙ্গি সংগঠনের কোনও নেতার আলোচনা শুরুর প্রস্তুতি বৈঠকে না থাকার সিদ্ধান্তের মধ্যেও কেউ আলফার 'অন্য কৌশল' খুঁজতে নারাজ।

Ulfa on a mission

Time for Delhi to test sincerity

9/11/99
Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa continues to play the Scarlet Pimpernel but if the latest developments are any indication, he could be in Delhi next month. Thanks to facilitator Jnanpith Award winner Mamoni Goswami's untiring determination to bring Ulfa and the Centre to the negotiating table, Rajkhowa, as a first step, has reportedly constituted a nine-member "people's consultative group" that includes journalists, lawyers, a human rights activist, a sports organiser and a leader of a powerful youth organisation. Its objective is to prepare modalities for talks, implying that Ulfa leaders would be associated only at the final stage and when they are absolutely sure of an outcome. Herein lies the rub. By carefully selecting members from different walks of life, Ulfa seeks to convey the message that it still enjoys public support and wants to bargain from a position of strength. Though a welcome development, it is premature to suggest peace will take root since Ulfa leaders are known for changing tack, are insincere, unpredictable and cannot be trusted. Had they been serious enough they would not have hijacked the peace initiative after they were driven to the wall by Operation Rhino in 1991.

For one thing, Ulfa leaders will meet central leaders on their own terms — that sovereignty will be discussed, something incompatible with the Constitution and which most have given up as unattainable but is, for Ulfa, the must-have. Of some significance is an earlier statement by Ulfa self-styled commander-in-chief Paresh Barua who told a website that "we are asking for a discussion on sovereignty... it does not mean granting the same". Ulfa's demand for the release of 10 leaders is yet to be met. But this should pose no problem if Ulfa is sincere about constructive dialogue. The absence of violence on Independence Day was a positive sign. It now makes sense to broker a ceasefire. For Ulfa leaders, the next few days will be a testing time, a time to erase the ISI mark.

THE STATESMAN

IMDT blocked detection, deportation: SC

In a stinging judgment on 12 July, a three-judge Supreme Court Bench headed by the Chief Justice, Mr RC Lahoti, overturned the Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunal Act of 1983 declaring it to be ultra vires of the Constitution. Excerpts:

To give the exact date of entry into India of a Bangladeshi national, who has illegally and surreptitiously crossed the international border, is not only difficult but virtually impossible. A citizen doing his duty towards the nation of pointing out the presence of a Bangladeshi national to the authorities of the state is put under threat of criminal prosecution, if the contents of the application are found to be false.

This is bound to have a cascading effect on citizens who will prefer to remain a quiet spectator to the continued influx ... rather than take initiative in their detection or deportation.

The Act does not contain any provision for constitution of a screening committee

which has been done under the rules and has been conferred a wide power of rejecting complaints under which no appeal lies. The figures supplied in the initial affidavit filed by Assam show that more than 85 per cent inquiries initiated were rejected and no reference was made to the tribunal.

Similarly, the restrictions imposed on an applicant, a citizen of India doing a national duty of pointing out the presence of an illegal migrant in Assam, that he should be resident of same police station or same sub-division where the illegal migrant resides or is found does not carry any sense as these migrants keep moving.

The requirement regarding application being accompanied by affidavits of two persons who are resident of the same police station or are being accompanied by declaration of another person who is resident of same sub-division or that not more than 10 such applications can be filed or 10 such declarations made do not serve any purpose except to create hurdles in the matter of

identification and deportation of illegal migrants ...

A deep analysis of the IMDT Act and the rules made thereunder would reveal that they have been purposely enacted or made so as to give shelter or protection to illegal migrants who came to Assam from Bangladesh on or after 25 March 1971 rather than identify and deport them.

The foremost duty of the Central Government is to defend the borders of the country, prevent any trespass and make the life of the citizens safe and secure. The Government has also a duty to prevent any internal disturbance and maintain law and order ...

There can be no manner of doubt that Assam is facing "external aggression and internal disturbance" on account of largescale illegal migration of Bangladeshi nationals.

It, therefore, becomes the duty of the Union of India to take all measures for protection of Assam from such external aggres-

sion and internal disturbance as enjoined in Article 355 of the Constitution.

Having regard to this constitutional mandate, the question arises whether the Union of India has taken any measure for that purpose.

...there cannot be the slightest doubt that the application of the IMDT Act and the rules made thereunder ... has created the biggest hurdle and is the main impediment or barrier in identification and deportation of illegal migrants ...

To sum up our conclusions, the provisions of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1984, are ultra vires of the Constitution and are accordingly struck down.

The Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Rules, 1984, are also ultra vires and are struck down ... The Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920, the Foreigners Act, 1946, the Immigrant (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950, and the Passport Act, 1967, shall apply to the state of Assam.

By Apurba K Baruah



ONLY a small sensible number of people in Assam seems to realise that deporting an illegal immigrant population of 15 or 20 lakh may not be a realistic proposition. But that is the bitter political truth that post-IMDT Assam politics must deal with. An elaboration of the obvious is necessary, particularly in view of the emotionally surcharged situation. The task of detecting and deporting a population of 15 lakh would require 300 trains of 50 bogies each, with an efficient, honest administration working whole time for 10 years. That too if there was no resistance!

But if it is not possible to deport them what do you do with them? If these immigrants are considered a threat to the identity and security of the local population and if it is not possible to deport them then the only sensible step to take is to create conditions for protection of the identity and security of those who are under threat.

If threat to identity is cultural, as is often claimed, then let us demand measures to protect the culture or cultures we want to protect. But as Ambikagiri, one of the defenders of the Asomiya Jati told us, a jati could protect itself only if it can protect its fields and markets.

To do this we have a model available in the hill tribal areas of North-east. By introducing stringent measures to prevent alienation of land and by introducing a system of trade licences the hill tribal communities have been able to protect their land and market.

Though a section of the tribal elite of the hills keeps crying that

Open Forum Debate

Assimilate



Residents of the Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon Muslim Refugee camp, stage a fast unto death in Guwahati to press their demands. — Eastern Projections

outsiders have been taking land and market over, hard facts do not support that. The demographic changes in markets and professions in favour of the local tribal are becoming tell-tale in most hill states of the region. Land alienation figures, too, show that the trend of alienation of land has been arrested. So the indigenous

communities of Assam must emulate the tribal brethren of the hills.

But it is also a fact that fields and markets can be protected only by work and enterprise. Are the local or indigenous communities of Assam prepared to do that? We need to keep in mind that a community's dominant values are the values

of its hegemonic sections.

In today's Assam, the hegemonic sections in all the communities are the educated middle classes and in almost all the communities these classes seemed to be promoting consumerist cultures that believe neither in work nor in enterprise. Because large tracts of land lie fal-

low, the illegal immigrants can cultivate those. Because local young men and women are averse to hard work the immigrants come to occupy jobs. If the elites of the indigenous communities want to protect their own communities, they must promote culture of work and enterprise and must also seek constitutional protection to save homelands. Home land in terms of land and market. Finally, we must realise that all communities grow as a result of assimilation of immigrants.

If Koch Rajbangshis, Ahom Kalitas and Brahmins could assimilate, the Bengali speaking immigrants will also assimilate. We need to create the climate for it. Ethnic politics is the bane of assimilation. It is a coincidence that ethnic politics and the politics of the end of ideology have emerged together? They are the bete noir of each other. If we bring ideology back

to politics, ethnic divide will lose importance and the process of assimilation would be strengthened.

People migrate in search of livelihood. And for masses of people political loyalties are subordinate to livelihood. It is true that largescale immigration makes assimilation difficult. But one cannot put the clock back. We cannot wish away the immigrants. They are here. The came in large numbers because we allowed them to come! Corrupt administration, including those who guarded the borders, opportunist politicians and unaware citizenry made their entry possible. We need to see that further immigration does not take place and those who came assimilate and make Assam their home in the true sense of the term.

(The author is with the department of political science, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong)

By Sanjib Baruah



THE IMDT Act of 1983 was a piece of bad law in more senses than one. It was passed by the Seventh Lok Sabha elected at the height of the Assam move-

Life after IMDT

ment. In much of Assam there was a successful boycott. Elections could be held in only two of 14 parliamentary con-

stituencies.

Though Assam's representation later inched up to eight, there were record low turnouts in the by-elections that elected these MPs. Passing a law applicable only to Assam by a Parliament where Assam's representation was under a thick cloud was not illegal in a technical sense. But that is only because ours is a rather weak form of federalism. It is not the best way to make laws in a federal system.

The IMDT Act fails the test of a good law in a technical sense as well, as the Supreme Court has ruled. It violates a

The movement of people from the land-scarce areas of eastern Bengal that began in the early part of the last century did not end with the Partition. It, however, no longer follows a single pattern of people seeking to settle and become citizens.

In some parts of the border there are people going back and forth daily. There are also seasonal migrants working in the booming construction industry of North-east India. But since there is no

Indo-Bangladesh protocol on labour movement, they may seek the protection of political patrons and try to get a ration card or some form of official documentation as "evidence" of citizenship to guard against harassment.

Giving them legal status as seasonal workers available to them could reduce

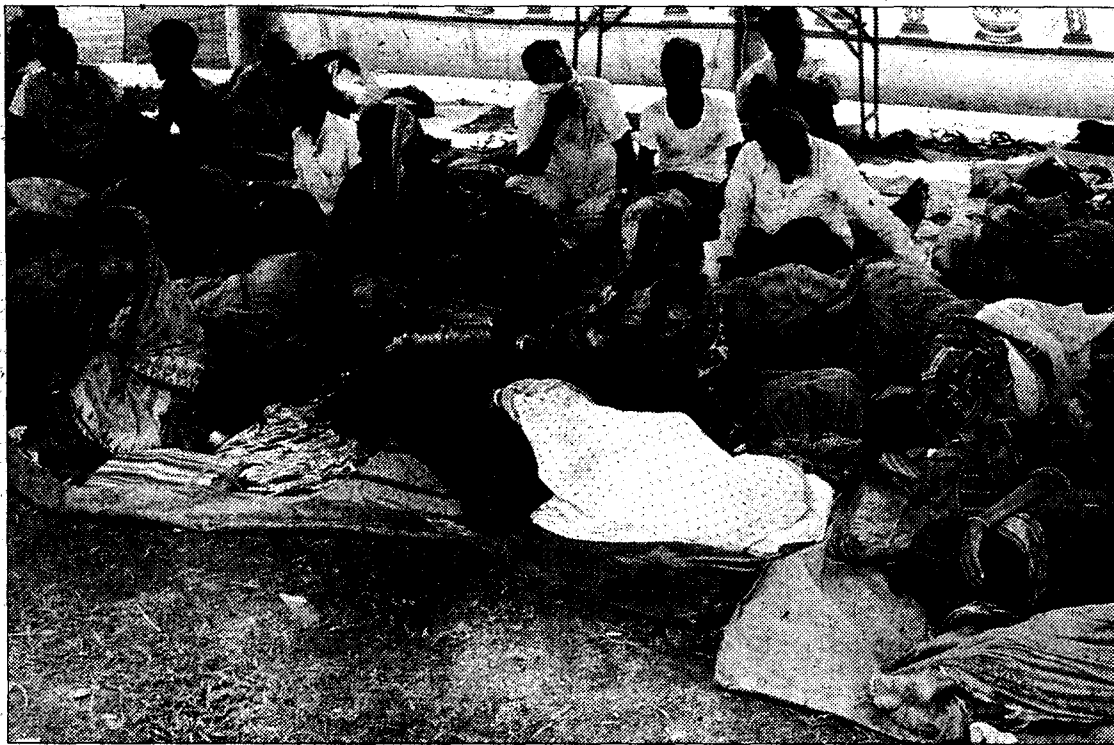
be a realistic proposition. But that is the bitter political truth that post-IMDT Assam politics must deal with. An elaboration of the obvious is necessary, particularly in view of the emotionally surcharged situation. The task of detecting and deporting a population of 15 lakh would require 300 trains of 50 bogies each, with an efficient, honest administration working whole time for 10 years. That too if there was no resistance!

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Though Assam's representation later inched up to eight, there were record low turnouts in the by-elections that elected these MPs. Passing a law applicable only to Assam by a Parliament where Assam's representation was under a thick cloud was not illegal in a technical sense. But that is only because ours is a rather weak form of federalism. It is not the best way to make laws in a federal system.

The IMDT Act fails the test of a good law in a technical sense as well, as the Supreme Court has ruled. It violates a basic jurisprudential principle - that of equality. The IMDT Act governed the determination of disputed citizenship status of a foreigner only in Assam and that too it applied only to those alleged to have come from Bangladesh after 25 March, 1971. In all other cases of disputed citizenship in Assam as well as in the rest of the country, the relevant law is the Foreigners Act of 1946.

Under this Act, the burden of proving citizenship status is on the person concerned. The IMDT Act reverses the burden and spells out an arduous procedure for making a complaint. The verdict on the IMDT Act is a reminder that laws have to be seen by citizens as legitimate and that the process matters. A majority in Parliament may vote for a law, but if basic norms, procedures and jurisprudential principles are ignored it may not be accepted as legitimate.

But we are no closer to solving Assam's vexed problem of illegal immigration today than before the court's verdict. The reason is simple: there are many facets to the illegal population movements across the border between Bangladesh and Assam. Neither the IMDT Act nor the Supreme Court's ruling against it, are fine enough instruments to deal with this complexity.

North-east India has been one of South Asia's last frontiers for nearly a century attracting legal as well as illegal immigrants from many parts of the sub-continent.

The movement of people from the land-scarce areas of eastern Bengal that began in the early part of the last century did not end with the Partition. It, however, no longer follows a single pattern of people seeking to settle and become citizens.

In some parts of the border there are people going back and forth daily. There are also seasonal migrants working in the booming construction industry of North-east India. But since there is no

Indo-Bangladesh protocol on labour movement, they may seek the protection of political patrons and try to get a ration card or some form of official documentation as "evidence" of citizenship to guard against harassment.

Giving them legal status as seasonal workers available to them could reduce the market for false documents as "evidence" of Indian citizenship. Ninety eight per cent of North-east India's borders are with foreign countries. India's external relations have more impact on life in North-east India than in almost any other region.

Its high stakes in the country's foreign policy should be recognised. The problems created by the cross-border movement of people between Bangladesh and India can be addressed only with more trust and cooperation between the two countries.

Indian claims that there are hundreds and thousands of Bangladeshis in India and the Bangladeshi counter-claim that there is none indicate that there is a stalemate. A solution cannot be round the corner under these conditions. India may decide someone is a Bangladeshi, but Bangladesh has to agree to accept them.

In the long run, only an agreement between Bangladesh and India and a bilateral institution responsible for managing the cross-border movement of people can address the many facets of the phenomenon.

Unilateralism, even with the Supreme Court's backing, cannot make a difference on the ground. But it would have costs in terms of the quality of relations between communities.

(The author is Visiting Professor, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi.)

Not for granted

Assam minority serves notice

The Congress can no longer take the support of Assam's religious minority for granted, at least not after the Supreme Court scrapped the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act which, since 1983, had safeguarded their interests. The United Minorities' Front holds Tarun Gogoi largely responsible for the Act's repeal, accusing him of ignoring its pleas to plug the loopholes in what it described as the government's "weak" affidavit submitted to the court. Last week's decision by the minority organisations' coordination committee under the aegis of the apolitical Jamat Ulema-e-Hind to float a political party in September is warning enough that they cannot keep silent any more. If this comes through it will be a formidable party and can upset election results, since religious and linguistic minorities have a say in as many as 40 of the 126 assembly constituencies. The one-month grace period is perhaps to allow parties as well as Aasu to soften their stance. The resentment among religious and linguistic minorities is understandable because they will once again be subjected to humiliating verification and harassment to establish their status as citizens.

The Jamat Ulema has been a traditional Congress supporter but it recently threatened that if elections were held under Gogoi's leadership the party's fortunes would suffer. It wants the government to fulfil its demands for the issue of permanent land settlement and citizenship certificates to Muslims occupying riverine land. Besides, the Congress faces a threat from three million Koch-Rajbonghis in the Bodo region who want Scheduled Tribes (Plains) status. The Bill introduced in Parliament in the 1990s lapsed, depriving them of even OBC status. The Congress cannot ignore them for they decide the fate of candidates in 35 assembly constituencies.

THE STATESMAN

SC notices to Centre, Manipur on blockade

Students threaten to step up Greater Nagaland stir

Agencies

New Delhi, August 22

THE SUPREME Court on Monday issued notices to the Central and state governments on the 60-day economic blockade in Manipur, which lasted over two months and paralysed life in the state. But that didn't stop Naga outfits from threatening to step up their campaign.

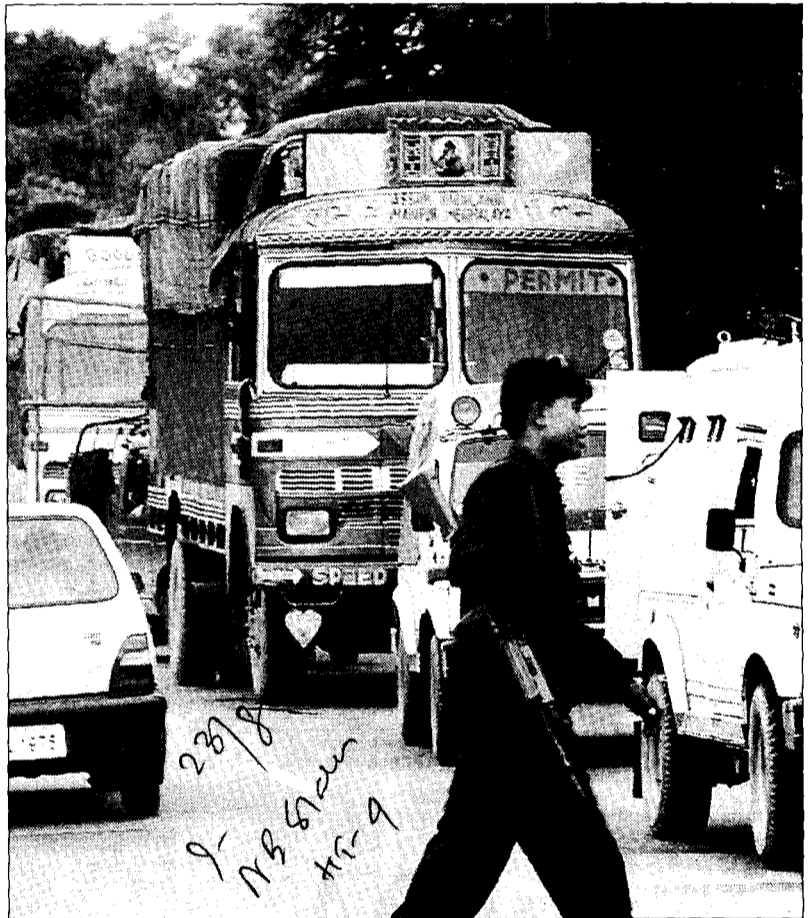
"We may soon be compelled to launch a more vigorous movement considering the negative attitude of the Manipur government," said Nga-chonmi Chamroy, leader of the the All Naga Student Association Manipur (ANSAM), which is spearheading the blockade.

A Bench of Justice Y.K. Sabharwal and Justice C.K. Thakker issued the notices on the PIL filed by Kh Jibon Singh alleging that the blockade had led to violation of the right to equality, life and free movement of the Manipuris. The petition said the blockade had pushed the price of the essential commodities like petrol, cooking gas and kerosene out of the reach of common man. The petitioner said Manipur was connected to the rest of the country by NH-39, which has been blocked, and the other road NH-53 had not been secured by the security forces in addition to it being non-motorable in many parts.

The blockade was temporarily lifted on August 10 after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh assured agitating Naga leaders that their grievances would be sorted out by Manipur Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh through negotiations.

"We were told negotiations would resume on August 18. But the government failed to respect its commitment and so we have decided to take to the path of protest once again," Chamroy said. The threat of another round of strike has sent locals in Manipur stocking up on essentials.

"It was like hell during the last strike that lasted for 50 days. We suffered a lot and now we are trying to stock up on essentials since the Nagas are threatening another block-



Trucks stranded on a national highway in Manipur on Monday.

ade," said Rohit Singh, a local resident in state capital Imphal. National Highway 39 and National Highway 53, the two arterial land routes that helps Manipur get supplies of essentials from outside the state, mainly from Assam, have remained blocked with truckers refusing to ply their vehicles fearing attacks by supporters of the agitation.

The blockade was enforced by an estimated 500,000 Nagas residing in Manipur who want tribal-dominated areas in the state to be merged with Greater Nagaland, a concept mooted by the Isak-Muivah faction of the Na-

tional Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM), a rebel group active in Nagaland. The Manipur government and the majority Meitei community in the state have rejected the demand by the Nagas.

The Nagas also want the Manipur government to withdraw its announcement declaring June 18 as State Integrity Day — to commemorate the deaths of about 20 people who died in clashes with security forces in 2001 during an uprising to protest New Delhi's decision to extend a ceasefire with the NSCN-IM beyond Nagaland.

PTI

23 AUG 2008

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Blockade in Manipur imminent

2-11-87
19-13
28/8

Trucks rushing to Imphal

Iboyaima Laithangbam

IMPHAL: The All-Naga Students Association, Manipur (ANSAM), may reimpose the economic blockade against this State from midnight on Tuesday night. Paul Langhu, president, has alerted all members to be ready to resume any moment the protest suspended on August 11.

All trucks, now in Assam loaded with commodities, are being rushed here in view of the imminent blockade.

ANSAM has asked drivers and traders, whose driving licence and commodities were confiscated during the 52-day blockade begun on June 20, to collect them from its members by 6 p.m. on Tuesday. No claim will be entertained thereafter.

Ibobi seeks protection

Chief Minister Okram Ibobi, who returned here from New Delhi on Sunday evening after meeting Central leaders, said Prime Minister Manmohon Singh asked him to get blockade on National Highways 39 and 53 lifted. He urged the Prime Minister to ensure protection for Manipur vehicles passing through Nagaland as the Naga Students Federation and non-governmental organisations in that State joined hands with AN-

SAM, which is demanding that the June 18 State integration day holiday be scrapped. NH 39 passes through Nagaland.

The Prime Minister assured him that funds would be provided for repairs to NH 53, said Mr. Ibobi. Mr. Ibobi insists that talks with ANSAM will be held only in Imphal, and not in its headquarters in Senapati district or in New Delhi.

Meanwhile, the Centre has permitted the Manipur Government to import 50,000 tonnes of rice from Myanmar within the current financial year, according to highly placed official sources. The first consignment of 5,000 tonnes is expected by the first week of September.

The sources said though rice was not among the 22 items approved by the two countries for import and export, the Director-General of Foreign Trade in 1995 issued a notification permitting Manipur to buy 50,000 tonnes of rice to tide over shortage. Now in the wake of the protracted economic blockade, there has been an alarming shortage of rice and other essential commodities.

The sources said rice brought from Punjab or Haryana had to be sold in Imphal at Rs 18 a kg, whereas the Mynamar product would cost only Rs 12. The border with Myanmar is just 109 km from here.

THE HINDU

Secrecy prevails

Tit for tat in Assam

By demanding a CBI probe into "secret killings" in Assam since 1991 the AGP seeks to pay the Congress in its own coin. In the interim report of the one-man commission headed by retired Justice JN Sarma to inquire into the "secret killings" of Ulfa kin during the second AGP regime (1996-2001), former chief minister Prafulla Mahanta emerges unscathed. Little wonder then that chief minister Tarun Gogoi and his cabinet find it unacceptable and want a fresh inquiry. But whether the new one to be headed by a retired Supreme Court judge will be able to prepare its report before the 2006 assembly election — Gogoi's prime objective is to pin down the AGP for substantial electoral gains — is doubtful. While the AASU describes the report as "shameful", the AGP rightly questions the wisdom of conducting inquiries into only six "specific" cases when there were said to be as many as 100. In the three cases the commission finds no evidence of any political, bureaucratic or police involvement. Even in the killing of the brother of former Ulfa publicity secretary, Mithinga Daimary, and four members of his family, no one attested. What's more, Justice Sarma complains of not getting help from the state government in preparing the report.

There is no denying the hush-hush killings or fratricidal bloodshed involving former Ulfa members (Sulfa), many of whom were allowed to retain arms by the late Hiteswar Saikia for self-protection. All this happened after an abortive bid on Mahanta's life in 1997. But even if his government did indulge in such activities, to soften up Ulfa attacks on party workers perhaps, Mahanta should have taken his cabinet into confidence. There is no smoke without a fire and hopefully the new commission will be able to unearth the truth to the satisfaction of all concerned.

22 AUG 2005 THE NEWSPAPER

মুইভা-আল কায়দা যোগাযোগের অভিযোগ

রঞ্জন সেনগুপ্ত • গুয়াহাটি

১৮ অগস্ট: নাগাল্যান্ডের সঙ্গ এনএসসিএন (আইএম) জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠীর কায়দার ঘনিষ্ঠ সম্পর্কের অভিযোগ উঠল। আইজাক-মুইভাদের শত্রু খাপলাং গোষ্ঠীর দাবি, তারা এই ব্যাপারে 'প্রমাণ' গত, এপ্রিলেই কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র দফতরের হাতে তুলে দিয়েছে। সেই প্রমাণ হাতে পেয়ে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার কী করল, আগামী ২২ অগস্ট স্বরাষ্ট্র দফতরের সঙ্গ বৈঠকে সে কথা জানতে চাইবেন খাপলাং গোষ্ঠীর নেতারা।

কী সেই 'প্রমাণ', টেলিফোনে আজ তা জানিয়েছেন খাপলাং গোষ্ঠীর নেতা কে এম মুলাতান। তার দাবি, ১৯৯৪ সালে নির্বিঘ্নে জঙ্গি সংগঠন থাকাকালীন আফগানিস্তানের টোরাবোরাতো আল কায়দার প্রশিক্ষণ শিবিরে প্রশিক্ষণ

নিয়চ্ছে আইএম গোষ্ঠীর আট জন কায়দার। শুধু তাই নয়, আল কায়দার ঘনিষ্ঠ জন্ম ও কাশ্মীরের জেহাদিদের সঙ্গ নির্বিঘ্নে সম্পর্ক রেখে কাজ করছেন এক ব্যক্তি। তাঁর নাম খিভান মুইভা। আইজাক-মুইভার ঘনিষ্ঠ ওই ব্যক্তি বেআইনি ভাবে পাসপোর্ট-ভিসা বাবস্থা করে দিয়ে দিল্লিতে জেহাদিদের ঘাটি তৈরি করতে সাহায্য করছে।

খাপলাং গোষ্ঠীর অভিযোগ অবশ্য আইএম দিয়েছেন আইএম নেতারা। উড়িয়ে দিয়েছেন আইএম নেতারা। আইএম নেতা ও জঙ্গি সংগঠনের মুখপাত্র কেইবো চাওয়াং কাম্প হেরন থেকে টেলিফোনে বলেন, "শুধু আল কায়দা কেন, কোনও আন্তর্জাতিক জঙ্গি সংগঠনের সঙ্গেই আমাদের যোগাযোগ নেই। তবে উত্তর-পূর্বের সমমনোভাবাপন্ন কোনও কোনও জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠীর সঙ্গে আমরা যোগাযোগ রেখে চলেছি।" বিদেশে আল কায়দার শিবিরে

ক্যাডারদের প্রশিক্ষণ নেওয়ার ব্যাপারে তাঁকে প্রশ্ন করা হয়। উত্তরে আল কায়দার শিবিরের প্রশিক্ষণ অধিকার করে তিনি বলেন, "যুদ্ধের কৌশল, অস্ত্র চালনা-সহ উন্নত প্রশিক্ষণ ও প্রযুক্তির সাহায্য নিতে আমরাও বিদেশের দারস্থ হই। সে তো কত ব্যাপারে ভারত সরকারও বিদেশী প্রশিক্ষণ ও প্রযুক্তির সাহায্য নেয়। উন্নত প্রযুক্তি জানার ব্যাপারে তো কোনও বাধনিবেধ নেই।"

আগামী ২২ অগস্ট দিল্লিতে কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র দফতরের সঙ্গ বৈঠকে বসছেন খাপলাং-নেতারা। কেন্দ্রীয় সঙ্গ অস্ত্র-বিরতি চুক্তির 'গ্রাউন্ড রুল'-এর কিছু সংশোধনী আনতেই ওই বৈঠক। তবে এ বার 'সিস ফায়ার অ্যাডভাইসারি বোর্ড'-এর চেয়ারম্যান পদে তাঁদের সংগঠনের কাউকে রাখার জন্য দাবি জানাবেন খাপলাং নেতারা।

সেইসঙ্গে উত্তর-পূর্বের দায়িত্বে থাকা কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র সচিবের কাছে মুলাতানুরা জানতে চাইবেন, মুইভাদের সঙ্গ কেন্দ্রের আলোচনা কতদূর এগোল এবং আর কতদিন চলবে।

বৃহত্তর নাগালিমের দায়িত্বে '৯৭ সালে অস্ত্র-বিরতি চুক্তির পরে আলোচনা শুরু করে আজও কেনও ফয়সালায় পৌঁছতে পারেনি দু'পক্ষ। সম্প্রতি দিল্লিতে দফায় দফায় বৈঠকের পরে অনেকটা রাগ করেই দেশ

ছেড়েছেন আইএম-এর শীর্ষ নেতারা। কেন্দ্রীয় সঙ্গ আরও ছ'মাসের জন্য অস্ত্র-বিরতি চুক্তির মেয়াদ বাড়ালেও মুইভার দিল্লির সরকারের আন্তরিকতা নিয়ে প্রশ্ন তুলেছেন। বৈঠকের অগ্রগতিতে যে তারা খুশি নন, তা প্রকাশ্যেই জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন মুইভা। নাগাল্যান্ডে মুইভাদের শত্রুরা মনে করেন, "এ সবই আসলে তামাসা।"

মুলাতানুর প্রশ্ন, "খুশি না হলে অস্ত্র-বিরতি চুক্তির মেয়াদ বাড়ালো কেন? তাঁর কথায়, গত কয়েক বছর আলোচনা চালিয়ে কোনও রাজনৈতিক সমাধানে পৌঁছতে না পারলেও আইজাক-মুইভা খুশি। কারণ, ভারতীয় পাসপোর্ট-ভিসা নিয়ে দিবা গোট্টা বিষয় ঘুরে বেড়াচ্ছেন তাঁরা। আবার নাগাল্যান্ড সরকারের কাছ থেকেও কোটি কোটি টাকা পাচ্ছেন।"

তবে এখনই কেন্দ্রীয় সঙ্গ রাজনৈতিক আলোচনা করতে নারাজ খাপলাং গোষ্ঠী। তাদের ব্যাথা, মুইভাদের পাশাপাশি তারাও আলোচনা শুরু করলে আইএম গোষ্ঠী যে কোনও ছুতোয় তাদের মোষারোপ করতে পারে। তাই মুলাতানুদের সিদ্ধান্ত, "আগে আইএম গোষ্ঠীর আলোচনা শেষ হোক। তারপরে আমরা আলোচনা শুরু করব।"

Union home secy disappoints Manipur

Statesman News Service

IMPHAL, Aug. 17. — Union home secretary Mr VK Duggal today said the 40 tons of essential items air-lifted to Imphal by Indian Airforce aeroplane in the wake of the 52-days long economic blockade by All Naga Students Association of Manipur and Nagaland based NSF on Manipur's two lifelines the NH-39 and 53 was "symbolic."

The secretary, making a whistle-stop visit to Manipur which just came out of unprecedented economic blockade, had little to offer the people of Manipur except an effort to open the NH-53.

On being asked about the blockade of NH-39 that effectively cut-off Manipur from the rest of India, he said the matter was an internal matter of Manipur, forgetting that NH-39 passes through Nagaland where major activities took place. He also said he trusted that people would not play mischief with talks going on. He said that though the central action came 52 days late, it should not be construed that the centre was sitting idle. "There was a lot of negotiation going on and he was meeting chief secretaries and police heads of the states involved, to diffuse the situation," he added.

Mr Duggal also said he made an aerial survey of the NH-53 and added that for immediate relief, Rs 7 to 8 crore was being released to undertake major repairing work post-monsoon to make the road traffic fit. In the long run the highway will be made double lane.

He said he had brought with him key

officials of Border Road Organisation, Food Corporation of India and IOC to review the highway, food-stock and petroleum products. He said there was a need to increase capacities and build-up stocks of petroleum products and food grain to make the people self-sufficient.

Mr Duggal further said the carrying capacity of NH-53 has been increased from 10 tons to 15 tons and it can now handle 100 vehicles per day.

On the security along the NH-53 he said he would like to see a situation where they would not be needed and the police can take over. On the non-availability of essential items in the market he said, the state has now enough stock and the government has to ensure that they are available in the market. Mr Duggal arrived here today from Guwahati and later left for Delhi.

During his brief stay he met the chief minister Mr O Ibobi Singh, Governor Dr SS Sidhu, chief secretary and heads of security forces to take stock of the situation. Both chief minister and the Governor left for New Delhi today where there will be a negotiation with ANSAM leaders over the state government's decision to declare 18 June as holiday and State Integrity day over which ANSAM launched the economic strike.

Mr Ibobi Singh goes to New Delhi with a strong warning from frontline Manipur organisations against any step to retract his government's decision on the holiday. United Committee of Manipur has strongly warned that it would launch a massive agitation if the state government does a U-turn on the holiday decision.

THE STATESMAN

N.S. 8/16/78

Gogoi govt rejects probe report on 'secret killings'

Statesman News Service

SI-5 1978

GUWAHATI, Aug. 16. — The Assam government has rejected the interim report of Justice JN Sharma Commission probing allegations of "secret killings" of relatives of Ulfa members during the previous AGP regime headed by Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta.

Chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi today informed that the state Cabinet had found lots of 'discrepancies and contradictions' in the interim report of the one-man commission which has found no evidence of involvement of politicians and top bureaucrats behind the secret killings still shrouded in mystery, and hence decided not to accept it. The state cabinet took note that the interim report stated that there was a

definite conspiracy in targeting the victims and motive behind the killings.

"The inquiry commission relied more on the evidence provided by the police than family members of the victims. There is no dispute that secret killings took place in the state during the AGP rule and the people of Assam had already given their verdict on it during the last Assembly polls. Our government constituted the enquiry to find out culprits behind the killings and give recommendations on how to prevent recurrence of such incidents," Mr Gogoi said. As the one-man commission has failed to pinpoint the culprits in its interim report related to three out of the six specific incidents of secret killings, Assam government is now planning to constitute another probe panel to be headed by a retired Supreme Court judge.

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“Secret killings”: ex-gratia for victims’ families

of NB Status
16/8/13

Assam Chief Minister Gogoi asks ULFA to come forward for peace talks

Sushanta Talukdar

GUWAHATI: Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi on Monday announced an ex-gratia of Rs. 3 lakhs to each of the families of victims of “secret killings” which, he alleged, had occurred during the previous Asom Gana Parishad regime. Mr. Gogoi also appealed to the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) to come forward for peace talks. In his speech after the ceremonial flag hoisting on the occasion of the 59th Independence Day, Mr. Gogoi alleged that some people were “secretly killed under mysterious circumstances” during the previous government’s tenure.

Mr. Gogoi’s announcement came after the Justice (Retd.) S.N. Sarma one-man commission on the “secret killings” submitted its first

- One-man commission on the killings submitted its first report on August 12
- ULFA no longer enjoys the people’s support
- Upper age limit for entry into government jobs raised to 36 years

report to the Government on August 12. The panel was not able to draw any conclusion about the killing of ULFA central publicity secretary Mithinga Daimari’s family members, but found prima facie evidence that Jyotish Sarma, brother-in-law of another ULFA leader, was a victim of infighting in the militant outfit.

The commission, appointed in November 2002, is also inquiring into three other cases of “secret killings” — the murders of Dimba Rajkumar, brother of ULFA

chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa; Dipak Choudhry, brother of its foreign secretary Sasha Choudhury and that of Dwijen Haloi and Phulen Haoli of Nalbari.

Defying the call given by ULFA for boycotting the Independence Day, hundreds of people in the State took part in the celebrations amid tight security. No untoward incidents were reported during the day. The celebrations were peaceful at Dhemaji, where 13 women and children were killed in a bomb blast triggered by ULFA at

the parade ground on August 15 last. Mr. Gogoi said people had openly protested killings and violence. He urged ULFA to shun violence and come forward for talks in the interest of the State’s development. Mr. Gogoi also announced raising the upper age limit for entry into government jobs to 36 years, pension for retired and working teachers of deficit grant colleges, the creation of an artiste welfare fund and raising the remuneration of village chiefs from Rs. 1,100 to Rs. 1,350.

Reiterating the State Government’s commitment, Mr. Gogoi said stern action would be taken if any individual, police personnel or Government servant harassed any person belonging to a minority community in the name of detection and deportation of foreigners.

16 AUG 2003 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Brus' bid farewell to arms, but what about IDPs?

By Meera Sundar

The Mizoram government can finally heave a sigh of relief with the conclusion of a critical

stage of a decade-long problem in the Mizo capital of Aizawl recently. It is not just about one more pact in Mizoram. It is the outcome of, protracted negotiations between the state government and the Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) for over four years in which 12 rounds of talks finally culminated in a solution agreeable to both sides: the rebels surrendered their arms and ammunition, at Tuipuibari Transit Camp in western Mizoram.

The BNLF, headed by its president Surjaya Moni Reang and general secretary Solomon Prophul Ushoy, had formally laid down arms, consisting of AK-47s, M-16s and SL rifles, a small batch of nine weapons with more than 600 rounds of ammunition.

At least 195 Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) cadres and their families totalling 285 people were transported from the Naisingpara camp in Tripura in 30 pickups and 10 medium trucks with police escort.

The camp, now called Sidan Transit Camp, has 42 houses to accommodate all these families. Electricity, water supply and other household facilities have been provided. Senior doctors have conducted medical check-ups of the rebels on their arrival at the camp.

Mizoram home min-

ister Tawnluia declared that the state government would take all steps to accelerate the pace of development in the western belt of Mizoram covering Bru (also known as Reangs) settlements.

A special development project will be implemented, depending upon the quantum of financial assistance received from the Centre, he said. Earlier, during the visit by Union home minister Shivraj Patil, it was announced that the Centre would provide Rs 28 crore for the rehabilitation of the rebels.

But now an even bigger task confronts the state government, after the paper work of the peace accord: the repatriation process of the BNLF displaced, driven out by the Mizos in 1997 and who took refuge in neighbouring Tripura. The main difference between Tripura and Mizoram is over the number of Bru refugees, who had been displaced from their homes and villages.

The Mizo government says 17,000 Brus had left for Tripura in 1977 (as internally displaced people or IDPs), while Tripura says some 33,000 people were sheltered in six north Tripura camps. In addition, there was no time-frame for repatriation proposed in the peace accord between the Mizoram government and BNLF, signed in April. Already, the powerful NGOs in the state have sent a strong message to the state government that proper identification of Brus of Mizo origin from those in the Tripura camps should be prioritised.

These groups also asserted that the 1995 voters' list should be used to identify whether or not the person was a Mizoram resident. But officials here say that the government would take effective steps to take back the bona fide residents of Mizoram

and a special development project will be implemented, depending upon the size of the financial assistance from the Centre. The BNLF, floated in 1997, had demanded a separate autonomous district council for the Brus carved out from the north-western parts of the state. After local tension, following the death of a Mizo forest officer in the hands of Brus, many Bru families left for Tripura in October 1997.

Other Brus joined them later in 1998, swelling their numbers, and they were treated as refugees by Tripura and the Government of India and lodged in six different camps. Camp life was hard for the Brus despite Central assistance and resentment finally took the shape of the militant uprising, although the number of armed cadres and arms, as noted earlier, was small. But it was a blow to the Mizoram government which had prided itself on establishing the "most peaceful" state in India after the end of the Mizo insurgency in 1986.

Some church leaders were approached to act as intermediaries between the government and the BNLF. In its memorandum of 18 April, 2001 to the Mizoram government, the BNLF again demanded the creation of an autonomous district council under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and listed another nine demands. In the first meeting, Mizoram government representatives rejected the demand for a separate autonomous district council. This was replaced with the demand for a regional council. Another meeting in 2002, where the demands were further toned down, also failed.

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

আলফাকে টাকা দেওয়ার অভিযোগ, বিপাকে কংগ্রেস

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, গুয়াহাটি, ১১

অগস্ট: যে জঙ্গি সংগঠনকে বাগে আনতে কেন্দ্র ও অসম সরকার নাজেহাল হচ্ছে, সেই আলফাকে 'খুশি' করতে মোটা অঙ্কের টাকা ভেট দেওয়ার গুরুতর অভিযোগ উঠেছে শাসক দল কংগ্রেসের বিরুদ্ধে। অভিযোগে জড়িয়েছেন তিন মন্ত্রী। অভিযোগ, আলফাকে টাকা দেওয়ার কথা প্রদেশ কংগ্রেসের প্যাডে লিখে স্বীকার করে নিয়েছেন দলের এক সম্পাদক। সমগ্র ঘটনায় বিস্মিত, হতবাক কংগ্রেস ওই সম্পাদককে 'শো-কজ' করে বলেছে, এটি দলকে জনমানসে হেয় করার চক্রান্ত। অভিযুক্ত এক মন্ত্রী পুলিশের দ্বারস্থ হয়েছেন। বিধানসভার বাদল অধিবেশনে এই নিয়ে বাড় বয়ে গিয়েছে। বিজেপি বিচার বিভাগীয় তদন্তের দাবি জানিয়েছে। সব মিলিয়ে ভোটের আগের বছরে স্পষ্টতই অস্বস্তিতে শাসক দল ও সরকার।

ঘটনার সূত্রপাত ওই চিঠিকে কেন্দ্র করে। রাজীব ভবনের ঠিকানা লেখা অসম প্রদেশ কংগ্রেসের প্যাডে আলফার চেয়ারম্যানকে কংগ্রেসের সম্পাদক এম এইচ চৌধুরী লিখেছেন, "আপনার ১২.১০.০৪-এর চিঠির প্রেক্ষিতে ৩০ লক্ষ টাকা পাঠানো হল। আমার সঙ্গে মন্ত্রী হেমন্ত বিশ্বশর্মা, গৌতম রায় এবং অঞ্জন দত্তের কথা হয়েছে। তারা প্রতি মাসে ৫ লক্ষ টাকা দিতে সম্মত হয়েছেন। তবে আর্থিক লেনদেনের কথা টেলিফোনে না বলাই ভাল। ওই মন্ত্রীদের উপরে যাতে কোনও আক্রমণ না হয়, তা দেখার জন্য অনুরোধ করছি।" এক পাতার চিঠিটি অসমিয়ায় লেখা। সেইটাই ইংরেজিতে।

চিঠির খবর প্রকাশ হতেই হই চই পড়ে যায়। বিধানসভার বাদল অধিবেশনে এই নিয়ে বিরোধীদের আলোচনার দাবি স্পিকার খারিজ করলেও স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী রকিবুল হোসেন বিবৃতি দিয়ে বলেন, "এ সব অপপ্রচার, ভিত্তিহীন খবর। সরকারের বিরুদ্ধে ষড়যন্ত্র শুরু হয়েছে।" বিধানসভার মতো প্রদেশ কংগ্রেস অফিসেও সকাল থেকে তৎপরতা ছিল তুঙ্গে। দলের অন্যতম সাধারণ সম্পাদক হরেন দাস এক বিবৃতিতে বলেন, "কংগ্রেসের সঙ্গে আলফার কোনও সম্পর্ক নেই। এ সব অসত্য প্রচার।" প্রদেশের প্রশ্ন, দলীয় প্যাডে কী করে চিঠির লেখকের নাম ছাপার অক্ষরে থাকতে পারে? হরেনবাবু বলেন, "চৌধুরীকে 'শো-কজ' করা হচ্ছে। তাঁর উত্তর পেলে তদন্ত করে শৃঙ্খলারক্ষা কমিটি ব্যবস্থা নেবে।"

সাধারণ ভাবে কংগ্রেস মনে করছে, পুরো ব্যাপারটিই সাজানো। তবে বিশেষত দলীয় প্যাড ব্যবহৃত হওয়ায় ফাঁপরে পড়ে গিয়েছেন তাঁরা। যেমন পরিবহণমন্ত্রী অঞ্জন দত্ত আজ মহানগরীর এসএসপি-কে চিঠিতে বলেছেন, "দোষী প্রমাণিত হলে দলের সম্পাদককে গ্রেফতার করুন। না হলে খুঁজে বার করুন, কারা চক্রান্ত করল।"

করিমগঞ্জের কংগ্রেস নেতা এম এইচ চৌধুরী অবশ্য এই ঘটনা তাঁকে ও দলকে হেয় করার চক্রান্ত বলে মনে করেন। আজ রাজ্যের স্বরাষ্ট্র কমিশনারের বার্তা পেয়ে বিধানসভায় যান তিনি। পরে সরকারকে চিঠি দিয়ে অভিযোগ অস্বীকার করেন। পরে দিশপুর থানাতেও প্রায় একই বক্তব্য জানিয়ে তিনি অভিযোগ দায়ের করেন।

Row over ministers' Ulfa 'links'

Cong leader showcaused for his 'letter' to outfit chief

Agencies
Guwahati, August 11

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HR-3*

THE CONTROVERSY surrounding an alleged letter written by a Congress member on "payments" made to the Ulfa by three ministers deepened on Thursday, with the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) issuing him a show-cause notice.

The issue of the alleged "letter" – published in a local newspaper here on Thursday – figured in the state Assembly, with the Opposition AGP and BJP demanding a probe.

The letter – purportedly written by APCC secretary M.S. Choudhury addressed to Ulfa chairman Arabindo Rajkhowa – claims that three senior ministers – Anjan Dutta, Gautam Roy and Himanta Biswa Sarma – were making monthly payments to the outfit. Choudhury denied having written such a letter and described it as an attempt to tarnish his political image.

APCC general secretary Haren Das on Thursday issued a show-cause letter to Choudhury, asking him to clarify and stressed that the Congress never maintained any links with the rebel outfit.

BJP spokesman Ashok Singhal described the matter as "serious" and demanded a CBI probe into the issue. Anjan Dutta, when contacted, denied the allegation and said he had approached the police to verify the authenticity of the letter and punish whoever was guilty of bringing disrepute to his name and that of his colleagues.

I-Day boycott

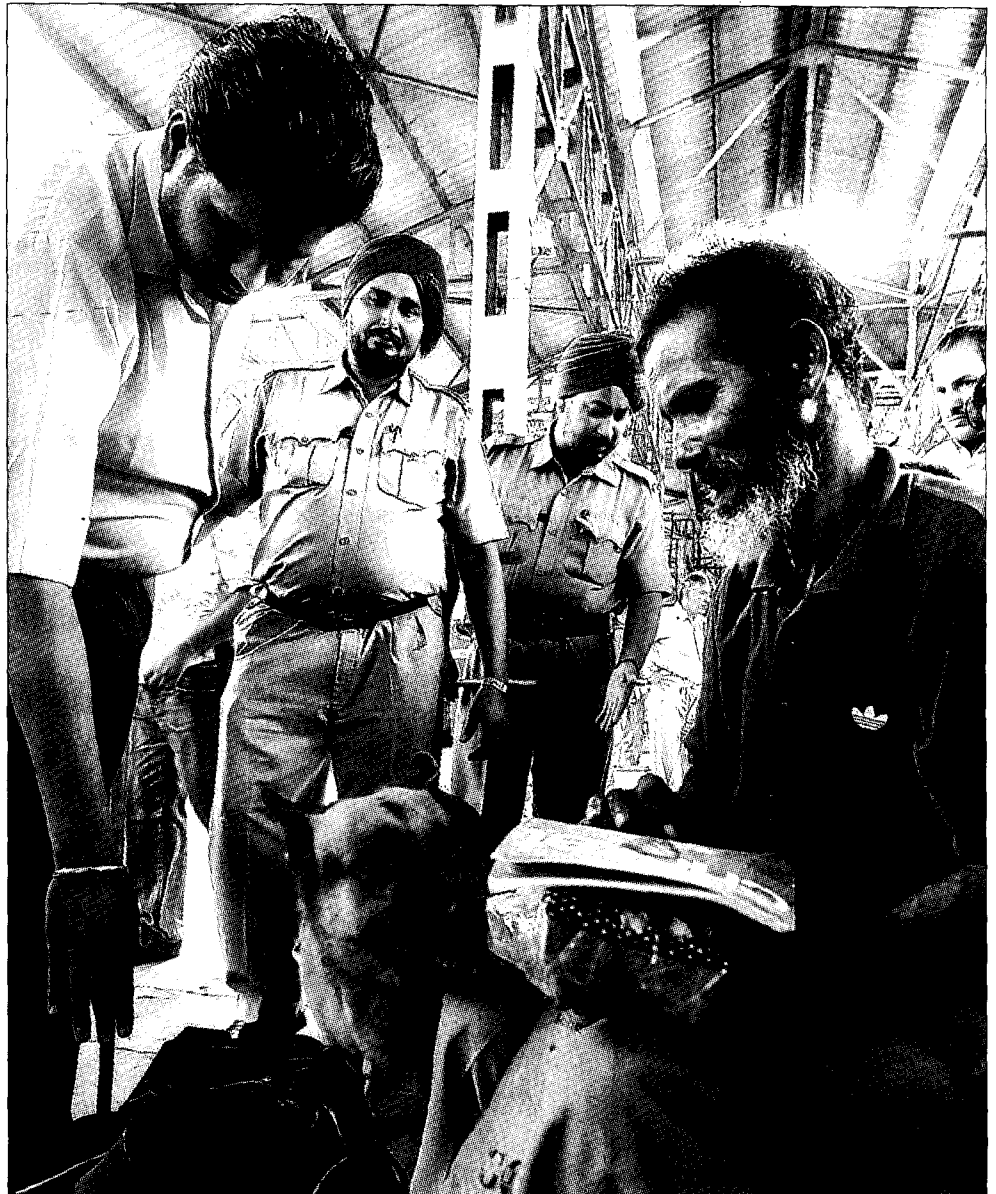
THE ULFA and three other militant outfits – the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), Manipur People's Liberation Front and Tripura People's Democratic Front (TPDF) – have called a boycott of the Independence Day celebrations and declared a general strike from 1 am to 5.30 pm on August 15.

In a joint statement e-mailed to the local media here on Wednesday night, the militant outfits urged the people of the North-east to stay away from the celebrations and observe the strike.

Militant outfit Karbi Longri NC Hills Liberation Front (KLNLFF) had earlier announced that it would observe a 24-hour bandh on the occasion of Independence Day and mark the day as a 'Black Day' in the twin hill districts of Karbi-Anglong and North Cachar Hills. The bandh will begin at 5 pm on August 14 and end in the evening on Independence Day.

The Ulfa violence, meanwhile, continued unabated with the gunning down of a tea garden manager, Suresh Limbu, in Assam's Tinsukia district, the police said in Guwahati on Thursday. Two Ulfa militants stormed the manager's residence at Rongmola tea estate, in Brahmapur under Pengeri police station of the district, late on Wednesday night and shot him.

Security throughout the state has been tightened following a series of blasts triggered by the banned outfit ahead of Independence Day and patrolling has been intensified, with additional security checks being carried out in the sensitive areas. Security in and around vital installations, such as oil and gas pipelines, power houses, transmission towers, electric poles and railway tracks have been beefed up.



Passengers being frisked at Amritsar railway station on Wednesday.

Ulfa attacks in run-up to big day

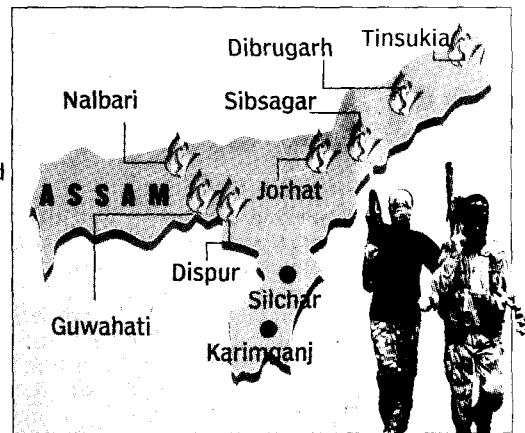
AUG 2: CRPF-police team ambushed in Tinsukia. One CRPF jawan killed, five others injured

AUG 6: Grenade explodes in Guwahati. Two injured

AUG 7: Blast in 2 OIL pipelines at Sibsagar and Dibrugarh

AUG 8: Explosion in oil pipeline at Tinsukia
 ■ Bomb defused near two schools in Jorhat
 ■ Explosion at an ASEB powerhouse

Aug 9: Gas pipeline explosion at Disaibotha in Sibsagar
 ■ Explosion at a steel bridge along Assam-Arunachal border



12 AUG 2005

বৈঠকে রাজি কি না, আলফার জবাব চায় কেন্দ্র

রঞ্জন সেনগুপ্ত • গুয়াহাটি

১০ অগস্ট: রাজ্য জুড়ে বিক্ষোভের মধ্যেই আলফার কাছ থেকে শান্তি আলোচনায় বসার 'পাকা কথা' চাইল কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। তবে সরাসরি নয়, 'মধ্যস্থতাকারী' ইন্দিরা গোস্বামী ওরফে মামণি রায়সমের মাধ্যমে। আলফার 'কোর' দাবি সার্বভৌমত্ব-সহ বিভিন্ন বিষয় নিয়ে আলোচনার জন্য পরেশ বরুয়াদের আলোচনায় বসার আহ্বান জানিয়ে কয়েক মাস আগে চিঠি দেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ। জবাবে গত মাসে আলফার চেয়ারম্যান অরবিন্দ রাজখোয়া প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে জানান, তাঁদের দাবি একটাই— সার্বভৌমত্ব। কিন্তু সেটা নিয়ে কেন্দ্রের সঙ্গে তারা আলোচনায় বসবে কি না, তা ঠিক করার জন্য আলফার শীর্ষ কমিটির জেলবন্দি ১০ নেতার আগে মুক্তির ব্যবস্থা করুক সরকার।

রাজখোয়ার ওই চিঠিতে সন্তুষ্ট নয় প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দফতর। কারণ, চিঠির কোথাও 'আলোচনায় বসতে রাজি' বলে জানাননি রাজখোয়া। তাই বন্দি-মুক্তির ব্যাপারে সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণের আগে জঙ্গি নেতাদের পাকা কথা চায় প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দফতর। জাতীয় নিরাপত্তা উপদেষ্টা এম কে নারায়ণনের কাছ থেকে কেন্দ্রের এই যানোভাব জানানোর পরে কাল রাজখোয়াকে জরুরি 'ই-মেল' বাতী পাঠিয়েছেন ইন্দিরা গোস্বামী। কলকাতা থেকে টেলিফোনে আজ ইন্দিরাদেবী জানান, প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে পাঠানো রাজখোয়ার চিঠি তিনি দেখেননি। তবে

নারায়ণনের কথাবাতায় পরিস্কার, তাদের 'কোর' দাবি নিয়ে প্রধানমন্ত্রী আলোচনার আহ্বান জানালেও আলফা বৈঠকে রাজি কি না, তা জানাননি রাজখোয়া। কেন্দ্র তাদের কাছ থেকে ওই সোজা উত্তরটা, সহজ কথায় জানতে চায়। মামণির কথায়, "আলফার বক্তব্য জানানোর জন্য নারায়ণন আমাকে চিঠি লিখতে বলেন।"

অসমে ফের লাইনে বোমা

স্টার্ক রিপোর্টার, গুয়াহাটি, ১০ অগস্ট: স্বাধীনতা দিবসের আগে অসমে নাশকতার ঢেউ অব্যাহত। বিক্ষোভের হাত থেকে আজ অস্ত্রের জন্য রক্ষা পেয়েছে জনশতাব্দী এক্সপ্লেস। গুয়াহাটি থেকে মাত্র ১৫ কিলোমিটার দূরে বুন্দা টেঁশনের কাছে রেললাইনে শক্তিশালী বিক্ষোভক রেখে দিয়েছিল জঙ্গিরা। ভোর ৬টা নাগাদ তা নজরে আসার পরে অকেজো করে ফেলা হয়। সাড়ে ৬টা নাগাদ ওই লাইন দিয়ে জনশতাব্দীর যাওয়ার কথা ছিল।

নলবাড়ি জেলার টিহু-কৈলানকুটি স্টেশনের মাঝেও কাল রাতে বিক্ষোভক রেখে দিয়েছিল জঙ্গিরা। একটা ইঞ্জিন চলে যাওয়ার পরে সেখানে বিক্ষোভ হয়। পুলিশ জানিয়েছে, বিক্ষোভে লাইনে মারাত্মক ক্ষতি হয়েছে। রাতভর মেরামতির পরে আজ সকালে ওই লাইনে আবার ট্রেন চলাচল শুরু হয়।

সেইমতো কাল রাজখোয়াকে আমি 'ই-মেল পাঠিয়েছি।' কথায় কথায় নারায়ণন তাঁকে আরও বলেছেন, উত্তর-পূর্বের প্রায় সব জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠীই অস্ত্র-বিরতি চুক্তি করে আলোচনা শুরু করেছে। তাদের যথেষ্ট সম্মান দিয়েই আলোচনা চালাচ্ছে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। ব্যতিক্রম আলফা! প্রধানমন্ত্রী নিজের 'কোর' দাবি নিয়ে আলোচনার কথা জানালেও আলফা খুলে জানাননি, তারা আসছে কি না।

ইন্দিরার 'ই-মেলের জবাবে রাজখোয়ার মনোভাব কি, তা জানা না-গেলেও আলফা যে দাবি আদায়ের জন্য আলোচনার পরিবর্তে সশস্ত্র সংগ্রামকে সঠিক পথ বলে মনে করে, তা তাদের বক্তব্যেই পরিষ্কার। আজই 'ই-মেল' বাতী পাঠিয়ে আলফা উত্তর-পূর্বের সবক'টি জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠীকে 'স্বাধীনতা ও সার্বভৌমত্বের জন্য সংগ্রাম চালিয়ে যাওয়ার আহ্বান জানিয়েছে। একই দাবিতে ক্ষুদ্র জাতিগোষ্ঠীর বিচ্ছিন্ন লড়াইয়ে যে লক্ষ্যপূরণ হয় না, তা বোঝাতে গিয়ে এই প্রথম এনএসসিএন (আইএম)-র কড়া সমালোচনা করেছে আলফা। নাগা জঙ্গি সংগঠনের নাম না-করে বাতায় বলা হয়েছে, পঞ্চাশ বছর ধরে একা একা সংগ্রাম চালানোর পরেও তারা ঈর্ষিত লক্ষ্যে পৌঁছতে পারেনি।

বাগিচা-কর্তাকে গুলি। জঙ্গিদের গুলিতে গুরুতর জখম হলেন তিনিসুকিয়ার পেসেরি থানা এলাকায় রংমলা চা-বাগানের ম্যানেজার সুরেশ লিম্বু। আজ বাত আটটা নাগাদ বাগানের কাজ সেবে একাই গাড়ি চালিয়ে বাড়ি ফিরছিলেন সুরেশ। এই সময় তাঁর উপর গুলি করা হয়। পুলিশের সন্দেহ, এ কাজ আলফার।

1 1 AUG 2005

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

Manipur blockade ends 'temporarily'

Naga student bodies to meet CM

HTC & Agencies
Imphal, August 10

THE 'ECONOMIC blockade' on National Highways in Manipur, which entered the 49th day on Wednesday, at the call of a Naga students union in protest against a decision by the Ibobi Singh government, has been "suspended temporarily" from Thursday.

In view of the appeal by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Union home minister Shivraj Patil, a decision was taken by the All Naga Students Association Manipur (ANSAM) and the Naga Students Federation (NSF), to suspend the economic blockade which has severely affected movement of trucks, particularly along the Guwahati-Imphal Nation Highway, sources close to the student bodies said.

The decision was taken at a joint meeting of the ANSAM and the NSF in Kohima during the day, the sources said.

The NSF and ANSAM consulted NGOs before taking the decision, the sources said.

The ANSAM had called the economic blockade since June 22 in protest against a Manipur government decision declaring June 18 a holiday every year to observe State Integrity Day.

The ANSAM has said that the

government decision was against the plan for unification of the Nagas. The blockade, however, did not affect movement of trucks along the Silchar-Imphal NH 53, official sources said.

The sources in ANSAM said the economic blockade was suspended "temporarily" in response to the appeal by central leaders and student bodies in the north eastern region.

They said the NSF and ANSAM after proper consultation with the apex 'Naga Hoho' and NGOs decided to "relax the economic blockade temporarily" on two national highways — 39 and 53 — from 12 noon of August 11.

The ANSAM also responded to the invitation by Manipur chief minister, O. Ibobi Singh for talks and added that the state government should create a conducive atmosphere for dialogue.

In the event of the failure of the Manipur government to resolve the issue, the Naga students would be compelled to take an appropriate course of action for which the Ibobi Singh administration would be held responsible, the sources said.

Sources close to chief minister O. Ibobi Singh welcomed the decision of the ANSAM and reiterated his appeal to them to come to the negotiation table for talks.

11 AUG 2006

THE HILL...

BRIDGE, PIPELINE BLOWN UP

Ulfa steps up attacks

Press Trust of India

Bandh called

GUWAHATI, Aug. 9. — In stepped up attacks in Assam ahead of Independence Day, suspected Ulfa militants today fired at a convoy of trucks killing one person besides blowing up a gas pipeline, a bridge and interrupting power supply.

A report from Diphu said militants fired at a convoy of five trucks passing through Silvata forest killing the handyman of the first vehicle on the spot in Karbi Anglong district.

The trucks were carrying rice from the Food Corporation of India godown at Hojai in Nagaon district to Diphu district. The police found empty cartridges of AK-47 at the spot. Ulfa militants disrupted power supply by exploding a bomb today at Chengakhola in Golaghat district damaging three poles. They also blew up a transformer in a powerhouse at Narengi in Noonmati last night.

The militants blew up an Oil India Limited gas pipeline at Disaibotha area under Kakotibari police station in Sibsagar late last night causing extensive loss of gas and affecting supply to several tea gardens in the vicinity, police said. The ultras also exploded a bomb on a

GUWAHATI, Aug. 9. — The tribal militant outfit, Karbi-Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front, has given a 24-hour bandh call in the twin hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar from 5 p.m. of 14 August and called upon the people to boycott Independence Day celebrations in the two districts. The outfit has called for the bandh in protest against the alleged "human rights violation in the North-east". — SNS

steel bridge on Namsai-Bordumsa road along Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border last night but no casualty was reported.

A major disaster was averted in Jorhat town as police defused a time bomb placed near two schools just five minutes before it was set to explode yesterday. Meanwhile, a bag found abandoned at the Assam Engineering College Ground at Chandmari created a stir today but police found only a television and some clothes inside.

Assam's minister of state for home, Mr Rockybul Hussain, told the Assembly that the government had apprised all DCPs and SPs on the possibility of violence and held a special meeting of the Unified Command to underline steps to prevent militant attacks.

THE STATESMAN

বন্ধ, কার্ফুতে অচল মেঘালয় ক্রমশই মণিপুর হয়ে উঠছে

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, গুয়াহাটি
শিলচর, ৯ অগস্ট: বন্ধ-অবরোধ-
কার্ফু মিলে মণিপুরের চেহারা নিচ্ছে
মেঘালয়। মণিপুর জাতীয় সড়ক
অবরোধ-সহ বিভিন্ন হিংসাত্মক
কার্যকলাপে প্রায় অচল। মেঘালয়েও
লাগাতার রাতের জনতা কার্ফু এবং
আজ থেকে দু'দিনের বন্ধে জনজীবন
কার্যত স্তব্ধ। মণিপুরে কেন্দ্র হস্তক্ষেপ
করেছে। কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রসচিব এ সপ্তাহে
পরিস্থিতি বুঝতে মণিপুর যাচ্ছেন।
মেঘালয় সরকার বেকায়দায় পড়লেও
এখনও কেন্দ্রীয় সাহায্য চায়নি।

রাজ্যের মাধ্যমিক শিক্ষা সংসদ
'এমবোস' বিভাজনের দাবিতে সাধারণ
জীবনযাত্রা শুরু করে দেওয়ার যে
আন্দোলন খাসি ছাত্র সংগঠন মে মাসে
শুরু করেছে, তা আজও অব্যাহত।

জাতীয় সড়ক অবরোধ, শিক্ষা
প্রতিষ্ঠান ও সরকারি অফিসে পিকেটিং
কর্মসূচির পরে ৪ অগস্ট থেকে শুরু
হয়েছে রাতের জনতা কার্ফু। ক্রমেই
হিংসাত্মক হয়ে উঠছে ওই আন্দোলন।
লক্ষ্য, জাতীয় সড়ক ৪০ এবং ৪৪-এর
যানবাহন। রেহাই পায়নি অ্যান্থ্রাক্স ও
সম্প্রতি মণ্ডলাইয়ে একটি অ্যান্থ্রাক্স
লক্ষ্য করে পেট্রোল বোমা ছোড়া হলে
অগ্নির জন্য সেটি রক্ষা পায়।
আন্দোলনকারীরা যে গাড়ি সামনে
পড়ছে, তাতেই পাথর ছুড়ছে বলে
পুলিশের অভিযোগ। খাসি ছাত্র
সংগঠনের সঙ্গে আন্দোলনে যুক্ত
হয়েছে মেঘালয়ের ২০ টি সংগঠন।
পাল্টা হিসাবে কাল রাত থেকে খাসি
অধ্যুষিত এলাকায় 'কার্ফু' জারি করেছে
সরকার। বৃহত্তর শিলংয়েও ১৪৪ ধারা
জারি হয়েছে।

নিরাপত্তা না মিললে জাতীয়
সড়কে গাড়ি চালাবেন না বলে জানিয়ে

দিয়েছেন বরাক উপত্যকার যানবাহন
মালিকেরা। টিকিট কাউন্টারগুলি
থেকে শিলং ও গুয়াহাটির বাসের
টিকিট বিক্রি বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হয়েছে।
এর আগে লরি চলাচল বন্ধ হয়ে
যাওয়ায় পণ্য সংকটের আশঙ্কা বাড়ছে।

গত পাঁচ দিন দিনের বেলায় যান
চলাচল করছিল। দু'দিনের বন্ধের
ডাকে আজ থেকে তাও বন্ধ। বন্ধ
ডেকেছে বিভিন্ন মহিলা সংগঠন।
অভিযোগ, খাসি ছাত্র সংগঠনের দুই
নেতার মুক্তির দাবি জানাতে মহিলারা
মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে দেখা করতে চাইলে
পুলিশ তাঁদের উপরে অত্যাচার করে।

শুধু বরাক নয়, মেঘালয়ের
আন্দোলনের জেরে সংকটে পড়েছে
ত্রিপুরা ও মিজোরামও। মিজোরামের
এক সরকারি মুখপাত্র জানান, জাতীয়
সড়কে যান চলাচল স্বাভাবিক না হলে
দু'এক দিনের মধ্যে রাজ্যে জ্বালানি
তেলের অভাব দেখা দেবে।
মিজোরামে ১৫ টি তেলের ডিপোতে
সাকুল্যে ৬০০ লিটার জ্বালানি রয়েছে।

এমবোস-কাণ্ডে লণ্ডভণ্ড করে
দেওয়া অবস্থায় উন্নয়নের কাজ যে
থমকে দাঁড়িয়েছে, তা মেনে নিয়েছেন
মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ডি ডি লাপাং। হতাশা গোপন
না করে জানান, এমন আন্দোলনের
ফলে অতীতে বিভিন্ন রেল প্রকল্প
থেকে বঞ্চিত হয়েছে রাজ্য। এ বারও
শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠান ও সড়ক পরিকাঠামো
উন্নয়নের কাজ বন্ধ রাখতে হয়েছে।
এর জন্য সরকারি ঋণের ১০০ কোটি
টাকা ফেরত চলে যেতে পারে বলেও
ইঙ্গিত দিয়েছেন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী। ক্ষোভের
সুর উপ-মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ডঙ্কুপার রায়ের
গলাতেও। তাঁর হিসাব, আন্দোলনে
এক দিনে শুধু শিলংয়েরই ক্ষতি হচ্ছে
২ কোটি টাকা। ভাবমূর্তিও নষ্ট হচ্ছে।

ANADABAZAR PATSIKA

10 AUG 2006

তিন দিনে ১৭টি বিস্ফোরণ, আলফা আতঙ্কে ব্রহ্ম অসম

রঞ্জন সেনগুপ্ত • গুয়াহাটি

৯ অগস্ট: আলফা জঙ্গিদের পরের পর হামলায় কাঁটা হয়ে আছেন অসমবাসী। বিধানসভায় রাজ্য স্বরাষ্ট্র দফতরের প্রতিমন্ত্রী রকিবুল হোসেনের দেওয়া আজকের তথ্যটি এইরকম: স্বাধীনতা দিবসকে সামনে রেখে গত তিন দিনে আলফা জঙ্গিরা ১৭ টি বোমা ও গ্রেনেড বিস্ফোরণ ঘটিয়েছে। বিস্ফোরণে মারা গিয়েছেন চার জন। আহতের সংখ্যা পাঁচ। রাজ্য জুড়ে কড়া নিরাপত্তা বেষ্টিত মধ্যই আলফা যে তাদের কাজ হাসিল করে চলেছে, দিনের আলোর মতো সেই সত্য প্রকাশ হয়ে পড়ায় এখন 'টিকটিকি' হিসাবে ভূমিকা পালনের জন্য আম জনতার প্রতি আহ্বান জানিয়েছে রাজ্য সরকার।

এক প্রেস বিবৃতিতে অসমবাসীর প্রতি গণে সরকারের আবেদন: কোনও পুঁটলি অথবা সন্দেহজনক পরিত্যক্ত জিনিস কোথাও পড়ে থাকতে দেখলে দ্রুত থানায় খবর দিন। বোমা-বারুদ গোপনে সরবরাহ করা অথবা যে কোনও স্থানে তা রাখার সময় দেখলে হাতেনাতে দৃষ্টিদের ধরিয়ে দিন। বিনিময়ে মিলবে পুরস্কার এবং পরিচয় গোপন রাখার গ্যারান্টি।

তবে কি সরকার পুলিশের উপর আস্থা হারিয়ে ফেলেছে? এমনটা অবশ্য স্বীকার করে না গণে সরকার। বরং মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ও স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রীর দাবি, রাজ্যের আইনশৃঙ্খলা পরিস্থিতি ভালই।

বিভিন্ন জেলায় একের পর এক বোমা বিস্ফোরণের ঘটনা নিয়ে বিরোধীদের বিধানসভায় আলোচনার দাবিও খারিজ করে দিয়েছে সরকার পক্ষ। প্রতিবাদে আজ বিরোধীরা 'ওয়াকআউট' করেন।

রীতিমতো ঘোষণা করে আলফা উপর্যুপরি যে হামলা চালিয়ে যাচ্ছে, তাতে ঘুম ছুটে গিয়েছে জেলা



২ তারিখ: তিনিসুকিয়ায় টহলদার বাহিনীর উপরে হামলায় এক সিআরপিএফ জওয়ান হত।

৫ তারিখ: উদালগুড়িতে গ্রেনেড হামলায় এক সিআরপিএফ জওয়ান আহত।

৬ তারিখ: গুয়াহাটিতে গ্রেনেড উদ্ধার।

৭ তারিখ: শিবসাগর ও ডিব্রুগড়ে তেলের লাইনে বিস্ফোরণ, বোকোতে বোমা ফেটে চার জনের মৃত্যু।

৮ তারিখ: তিনিসুকিয়ায় তেলের লাইনে বিস্ফোরণ।

৯ তারিখ: শিবসাগরে গ্যাস পাইপলাইনে বিস্ফোরণ।

প্রশাসনের। বস্তুত পথই এখন ঘর হয়েছে পুলিশের। তথ্য বলছে, ব্রহ্মপুত্র উপত্যকার ২২ জেলার মধ্যে প্রায় ১৬ টি জেলায় ইতিমধ্যেই ছোট-বড় বিস্ফোরণের ঘটনা ঘটেছে। তেল ও গ্যাসের পাইপলাইন তো আছেই, সেইসঙ্গে বিদ্যুতের ট্রান্সফরমার, সেতুকেও আক্রমণের লক্ষ্যবস্তু করেছে জঙ্গিরা। শুধু নিরাপত্তাকর্মী নন,

সাধারণ মানুষকেও এ বার রেয়াত করছে না আলফা। তার প্রমাণ বোকো এবং যোরহাটের ঘটনা। যোরহাটে অসফল হলেও রবিবার দুপুরে কামরুপের বোকোতে বাস টার্মিনাসে বিস্ফোরণ ঘটিয়ে চার জনকে মেরে ফেলেছে আলফা জঙ্গিরা। আহত হয়ে তিন জন হাসপাতালে।

আলফা অবশ্য বরাবরের মতো এ

বারেও সাধারণ মানুষের মৃত্যুর দায় নিতে নারাজ। সংগঠনের চেয়ারম্যান অরবিন্দ রাজখোয়া এক ই-মেল বার্তায় বলেছেন, জনসমাগম-বিদ্যালয়-হাসপাতাল-ধর্মীয় স্থান আক্রমণ করা আলফার কর্মসূচি বহির্ভূত কাজ। বোকোর বিস্ফোরণ সম্মিলিত নিরাপত্তা বাহিনীর কাজ। আলফার নৈতিকতাকে কলঙ্কিত করার জন্য এ সব প্রচারণা করা হচ্ছে।

আলফার দাবি যাই হোক, স্বাধীনতা দিবসকে সামনে রেখে তাদের হামলা চালানোর পরিকল্পনায় ফের কাঁটা হয়ে রয়েছে অসমবাসী। এ বার আর শুধু রাতে নয়, দিনের বেলাতেও জঙ্গিরা হামলা চালাচ্ছে। জঙ্গি হামলায় সব থেকে বেশি ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত তেল ও গ্যাস কেন্দ্রগুলি। ধুলিয়াজান, শিবসাগরের পরে গত দু'দিনে তিনিসুকিয়া জেলাতে চারটি শক্তিশালী বিস্ফোরণ ঘটিয়েছে জঙ্গিরা। তেল ও গ্যাস চলাচলের একটি সেতু উড়িয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে। স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী বলেছেন, "আলফা তাদের কৌশল বদলে এখন মুখোমুখি সংঘর্ষের বদলে দূর থেকে লক্ষ্য স্থির করে আক্রমণ শানাচ্ছে। উদ্দেশ্য, একটা আতঙ্কের পরিবেশ সৃষ্টি করা।"

বিধানসভার বাদল অধিবেশনে এক লিখিত প্রশ্নের জবাবে রকিবুল হোসেন জানান, ২০০১ সাল থেকে এ পর্যন্ত জঙ্গি দমন অভিযানে খরচ হয়েছে ১৬ কোটি ৩০ লক্ষ ৭৫ হাজার টাকা। জঙ্গিদের হাতে সাধারণ মানুষ মরেছেন ৯৭৬ জন। অন্য দিকে সেনা-পুলিশের হাতে জঙ্গি মরেছে ১০০১ জন। স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রীর দেওয়া পরিসংখ্যান থেকেই পরিষ্কার, জঙ্গি অভিযানে জলের মতো টাকা খরচ হলেও বিস্ফোরণ, মৃত্যু ঠেকানো যাচ্ছে না। বছর বছর চলতে থাকা এই সমস্যার সমাধান কী ভাবে সম্ভব, তা জানা নেই তরুণ গণে সরকারের।

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Strike hits life in Naga areas

The protest in Manipur is against manhandling of a tribal woman by a non-tribal

Iboyaima Laithangbam

IMPHAL: Normal life in Naga-dominated areas in the four hill districts in this State was disrupted on Monday, when the All-Naga Students Association, Manipur (ANSAM), called a 12-hour strike in protest against the manhandling of a woman by a non-tribal at Langathel in Thoubal district on Sunday.

Police sources said the man, Moirangthem Ingocha, was arrested. What happened was a purely personal matter and amicably settled. There was no communal overtone.

Manipur is already reeling under the impact of a 50-day old economic blockade launched by

ANSAM demanding that the government revoke the declaration of June 18 as a State integration day holiday.

Meanwhile, Governor S.S. Sidhu left for Jiribam, bordering Assam, to see for himself the law and order situation along National Highway 53.

He will inspect the horrible road condition and fragile bridges, numbering over 60 on the 225-km national highway.

The visit comes in the backdrop of the Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil's directive that NH 53 be made operational for transport of essential commodities. Naga students in Manipur and Nagaland have effectively blocked NH 39, which passes

through Nagaland.

Despite the Union Home Ministry's instruction to the Army and Assam Rifles to beef up security along NH 53, insurgents blasted a Bailey bridge along NH 53 on July 19. The Manipur Government alleged that the insurgents had that night crossed in jeeps, carrying explosives, three Assam Rifles checkpoints with obstruction.

Agriculture Minister Pheiroijam Parijat, who is already camping at Jiribam, has pulled up personnel of 36 Border Road Task Force, saying repairs and road improvement works are being done at snail's pace.

Talking to reporters, he said he was not convinced by the

BRTF explanation of paucity of funds.

Planks are missing in some bridges. In most cases, the truck helpers have to set the planks right before the vehicles cross the bridges.

Warning to traders

The United People's Front has warned traders who are collecting goods transported by Nagaland buses, which operate up to Kala Pahar about 40 km from Imphal along NH 39.

It is alleged that a Nagaland-based insurgent outfit has been collecting Rs 3,000 for each Naga truck to carry essential commodities well within Manipur.

সঙ্কট চলছে মণিপুরে, যাচ্ছেন স্বরাষ্ট্রসচিব

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, আগরতলা ও নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, শিলচর, ৭ অগস্ট: অবশেষে মণিপুরে জাতীয় সড়কে অর্থনৈতিক অবরোধ বিষয়ে সরাসরি হস্তক্ষেপ করল কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। মণিপুরের ছাত্র সংগঠন আনসাম-এর এই অর্থনৈতিক অবরোধ কড়া হাতে দমন করতে মণিপুর সরকারের সঙ্গে শীঘ্রই জরুরি বৈঠকে করবে কেন্দ্র। আগামী সপ্তাহে মণিপুর যাবেন স্বরাষ্ট্রসচিব ডি কে দুগ্গল। জাতীয় সড়ক বরাবর কড়া নজরদারির জন্যও সেনাবাহিনীকে নির্দেশ দিয়েছে কেন্দ্র।

এ দিকে, ১৯ জুন থেকে ৩৯ নম্বর জাতীয় সড়কে টানা অবরোধ চলায় দেশের অন্য অংশ থেকে বিচ্ছিন্ন হয়ে আছে মণিপুর। সেনার সাহায্যে ৫৩ নম্বর জাতীয় সড়ক কিছু দিন আগে মুক্ত করা হলেও ৩৯ এখনও আনসাম-এর দখলে। ফলে, মণিপুরের কিছু এলাকায় অবস্থা দুর্ভিক্ষের পর্যায়ে পৌঁছেছে। খাদ্যদ্রব্য, জ্বালানি তো দূর অস্ত, চাষের সারও মিলছে না এখন। চরম মূল্যবৃদ্ধিতে কাঁচি উপত্যকার মানুষ। কদিন ধরে বিমানে যে অত্যাবশ্যকীয় পণ্য সরবরাহ করা হচ্ছিল, আজ থেকে অজ্ঞাত কোনও কারণে তা-ও বন্ধ হয়ে গিয়েছে।

প্রশাসন আজ জানিয়েছে, প্রচুর খাদ্যদ্রব্য ও পণ্য নিয়ে প্রায় ১৫০টি ট্রাক শিলচর-ইফল হয়ে ৫৩ নম্বর জাতীয় সড়ক দিয়ে মণিপুর পৌঁছানোর কথা। কিন্তু বৃষ্টি ও খারাপ রাস্তার জন্য সন্ধ্যা পর্যন্ত কোনও ট্রাক আসেনি। একটি সূত্রের খবর, ওই ট্রাকগুলির উপরে গুলি চালিয়েছে জঙ্গি ছাত্রেরা।

রবিবার কলকাতায় প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায় মণিপুর প্রসঙ্গে বলতে গিয়ে কিন্তু উত্তর-পূর্বের ওই রাজ্যে পৌঁছানোর নির্দিষ্ট পথের কথা বলতে পারেননি। প্রণববাবু বলেন, “উত্তর-পূর্বের যোগাযোগ ব্যবস্থা বেহাল। মণিপুরে পৌঁছানোর বিকল্প পথ চিহ্নিত করা হয়েছে।” অবরুদ্ধ মণিপুরবাসীর সমস্যার সমাধানে সাজা দিতে কেন্দ্রের কেন এত দেরি হল, তা নিয়ে মন্তব্য করেননি তিনি।

তবে সরকারি আশ্বাস মণিপুরের পরিস্থিতির উন্নতি করতে পারছে না। আস্তুরাজ্য সীমান্ত জিরিবাম থেকে ৩২ কিলোমিটার দূরে মক্রু সেতু ভারী যান চলায় বেহাল হয়ে পড়ে। তার উপর দিয়ে ১০ টনের বেশি ওজনের যান চলাচলের উপরে নিষেধাজ্ঞা জারি করেছে বিএসএফ। ফলে, আটকে রয়েছে কয়েকশো লরি।

4 die, oil pipeline hit in Ulfa blitz

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Aug. 7. — Militants of the banned United Liberation Front of Assam (Ulfa) stepped up violence in Assam in the run-up to Independence Day, exploding a bomb at Boko near here, killing four people, and triggering an explosion in an Oil India Limited (Oil) pipeline in Sibsagar district today.

The militants exploded a bomb hidden inside a bag on a bicycle in the busy Boko bus station in Kamrup district injuring seven people, four of whom died on their way to Guwahati Medical College Hospital. They also hurled a bomb at the Dhamdhama Army camp in Nalbari district late last night, but missed the target. The bomb exploded inside the Dhamdhama Telephone exchange. There was no report of any casualty or injury.

The pipeline blast disrupted supply of crude to Numaligarh, Guwahati and Bongaigaon refineries causing heavy loss to the oil industry. The pipeline carries crude oil from Upper Assam oil fields of both the Oil and the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation of India (ONGC) to refineries across Assam. The raging fire that broke out following the blast under the suspension bridge over Disang river at Sonpura Bagchu village, caused extensive damage to the nearby village engulfing at least ten houses, seven granaries and several heads of livestock.

Police said seven Ulfa militants triggered the powerful explosion from a distance around 11.45 p.m. yesterday after overpowering the security personnel posted to guard the pipeline at Sonpura Bagchu village, the home of the jailed Ulfa vice-chairman Pradip Gogoi. Oil engineers are now busy building a temporary pipeline parallel to the damaged one to keep up the supply of crude.

Mr AK Bhandari, Oil general Manager (services and business), who visited the site, said not much crude was lost as the flow through the main pipeline could be stopped by employees manning the nearest control room within two minutes of the explosion. But the crude trapped inside the pipeline was destroyed. Mr Bhandari said it might take a week to repair the damaged pipeline.

THE STATESMAN

Essential items airlifted to Manipur

Union Home Secretary to hold review meeting with three Chief Secretaries on Monday

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Concerned at the ongoing economic blockade in Manipur, the Centre is airlifting essential items and medicines.

The Indian Air Force lifted the first consignment from Guwahati to Imphal on Saturday.

Union Home Secretary V.K. Duggal has called the Chief Secretaries and Directors-General of Police of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland to the capital for a review on Monday of the situation arising out of the blockade-

launched by the All-Naga Students Association, Manipur (ANSAM), from June 20. Mr. Duggal is planning to visit Manipur over the next 10 days.

In a report sent to the Home Ministry, Governor S.S. Sidhu criticised the Manipur Government's declaration of June 18 as "Integration Day" but for which, he said, the crisis could have been avoided. ANSAM is demanding that the Government revoke the declaration of June 18 as a State holiday in honour of 18 persons killed while resisting the exten-

sion of ceasefire with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak Muivah) to Manipur. ANSAM says the government decision will hamper the goal of a separate Naga homeland.

Talking to reporters here, Rajeev Agarwal, Joint Secretary (Northeast) in the Home Ministry, said the Manipur Government was holding talks with the agitating students and "if necessary, the Centre will also hold talks." While National Highway 39, which passes through Nagaland, continued to be blocked,

the Centre with the help of the Border Roads Organisation opened the other lifeline, NH 53, to facilitate the movement of petrol, gas and medicines to Manipur. More than 1,000 trucks carrying petroleum products and foodgrains had reached Manipur through NH 53.

The Centre made arrangements to airlift edible oil, sugar and pulses through Assam Rifles. About 1,200 kg of medicines reached Imphal in the last two days and another 1,500 kg would be sent on Sunday.

0 11 21 THE HINDU

9 N 6 Grew

Militants tell illegal migrants to leave

SYED Sajjad Ali
Agartala, August 6

THE ALL Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) has issued a warning to all "illegal" Bangladeshis who infiltrated into Tripura after October 15, 1949, to leave the state immediately, a statement issued by the outfit has said.

ATTF and National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) have set October 15, 1949, as the cut-off date because on this date, the erstwhile princely state of Tripura merged with the Indian union.

Announcing the launch of 'Operation Rikhlai' (Rikhlai means flush out) to drive out illegal Bangladeshis migrants, ATTF president Ranjit Debbarma warned that those who dared to defy the outfit's diktat would face

stern action.

"Those who came from Bangladesh after 1949 are refugees and they should leave the state", he said.

The militant outfit, known for its bitterness against Bangladeshis, has massacred several innocent people in west Tripura in past 10 years.

Earlier, ATTF had given call for Operation Rikhlai in 1993, 1998 and 2003. Each time the call triggered tension and riot like situation erupted.

Sources in the state administration said they feared that the latest warning by the outfit might deteriorate situation in ATTF influenced areas, especially the Khowai sub-division, where several incidents of clash between tribals and Bangladeshis were reported in the past.

TROUBLE IN TRIPURA

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES



Left: Agitated residents storm Senapati district's police station. Right: A truck carries supplies to blockaded Manipur through National Highway 53 to the south-west of the state. — Eastern Projections.

Manipur's unending tragedy

Less than two months ago, when Naga talks with the Government of India were stalemated, a senior Naga leader (not from the NSCN) told me that if the Government of India was not prepared to be flexible on basic Naga demands such as "integration of Naga-inhabited areas", then Naga organisations would hold protests to press the issue. But what impact would such protests have on Delhi? I wondered. Surely, they would not listen to a few demonstrations? Ah, but the Naga figure said, the demonstrations would not be just in Nagaland, they would be extended to the Naga-dominated hills of Manipur. That struck me immediately as enormously significant and strategic. A home ministry official brushed aside the threat, saying it would not amount to much.

A few weeks later, having visited Nagaland and Manipur in the space of less than a week, the impact of the road blockade on Manipur is visible as is the growing reaction there.

The Government of India and the Manipur government could not have miscalculated more. Petrol prices have gone through the roof, with fuel selling at Rs 75 to Rs 80 a litre on the black market. Only two petrol stations in Imphal are open to motorists and they limit the quantity they sell (at the official fixed rate) to five litres a vehicle. The queues are enormous, and many wait in line not just for hours but overnight or as much as one or two days to get their due. They leave

their cars overnight in line, go to work or other assignments and then return to check the situation.

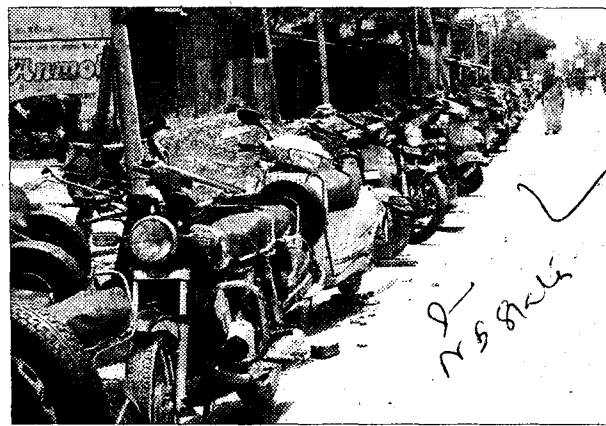
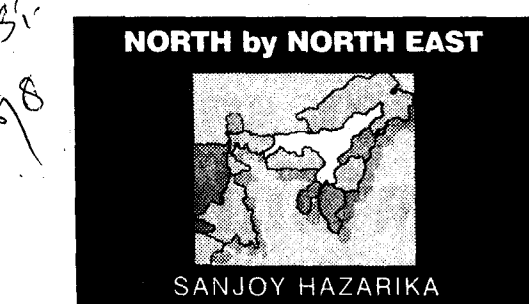
Five litres is little fuel; for those needing more, there is a flourishing black market where petrol and diesel are available in large jerry cans. Food prices have also rocketed with potatoes and onions selling at several times their normal price since the All Naga Students Association of Manipur (ANSAM) began their blockade of National Highway 39 which snakes through the Manipur Hills into Nagaland.

On the other side in Nagaland, they are supported by civil society groups which are supportive of the NSCN's views and positions.

Tough negotiators

THIS has overshadowed the extension of the ceasefire between the NSCN (I-M) and the Government of India at Amsterdam for six months, to be renewed by another six months. There have been angry words from the NSCN leadership out of the Netherlands on the pace of negotiations and the Manipur situation. But the proceedings over these years should have convinced tough negotiators like Th Muivah of the NSCN that it would be unrealistic to assume that New Delhi would hasten to a decision fraught with political consequences for a sensitive region where land is viewed by many groups as a source of identity.

The point is that despite the sharp talk, the ceasefire



A queue of motorcycles outside a petrol station in Imphal. — EP

process remains in place and seems to be good for the next year. All of Manipur suffers. It is not just the valley Manipuris who are suffering from the blockade; all who live in Manipur (barring politicians and bureaucrats) are its victims. So the Naga-dominated areas of Senapati and Ukhrul, of Tamenglong and Chandel (which also has a substantial population of Kukis) are also facing food and fuel shortages as well as rising prices.

In the valley, at least people have access to some form of food security and alternative crop and cash savings.

Some of the fallout from the blockade is interesting: instead of onions, which

need to be imported, says Amar Yumnam, economics professor at Manipur University, they use local herbs.

Traditional Manipuri vegetables are also gaining in popularity. In Imphal, even at the university which is at one end of the town, the sight of village women carrying cane basket loads of vegetables and fruits to sell in urban areas is an indication of rural entrepreneurship, driven by hardship.

But it is in the hills, the poorest and most marginalised parts of Manipur, where conditions are perhaps among the worst. These regions have never seen the face of development, a substantial reason for wanting to opt out. It is not the issue of being separate, as the rhetoric goes, from the Meiteis since "time immemorial" or of being with other Nagas in this very time-frame (for which there are few historic records) that lends logic and strength beyond emotionalism to the ideology seeking to break away from

Manipur. The reality of having been economically deprived, underdeveloped and successfully and continuously marginalised by governments at Imphal can give greater resonance to this view. But the Nagas are simply not pressing this point hard enough.

As far as the blockade is concerned, the situation has been aggravated by a foolish decision by Manipur Chief Minister O Ibobi Singh to declare 18 July, the day that Meitei protesters died in 2001 campaigning against the geographical extension of the Naga ceasefire to their state, as "State Integration Day". That was asking for trouble as it flies in the face of the "official" Naga negotiating position as declared by the NSCN of Naga "integration" involving slices of Manipur. Had Ibobi Singh not done this and restrained himself to simply declaring it a holiday on the day before the anniversary as in the past, under existing government powers, the backlash would have been less devastating.

Ibobi must go

BEFORE that declaration, he could have gone to Senapati and negotiated with the students. But if he tried to do that now, as they are demanding, it would be unacceptable to the Imphal Valley. He is compromised as a chief executive of his state. The decision was nothing short of reckless and the reaction to the blockade is now building up in Manipur with organisations and student groups organising counter-demonstrations to demand an end to the blockade.

Yet, on the whole, the Meiteis have been unusually restrained as they are acutely aware that their maturity is on trial here and hasty reactions could strengthen the campaign to divide Manipur. Other eth-

nic groups have jumped into the situation by adding their own special demands (full-fledged sadar district, for one). For the sake of human rights, it is time to end this blockade. People who are already poor and deprived, are going without the basic essentials. No group, however legitimate its demands may be, has the right to drive people to the edge of starvation. One cannot recall of any part of the country which has been held to a state of siege like this (we in the North-east are amazingly innovative in devising new ways of torturing ourselves) with the Government of India and the state government being but helpless spectators.

New Delhi is probably scared of taking a tough line and breaking the blockade for fear of disrupting the longest running talks to close the longest running insurgency in the region. Yet, it is evident that while the talks appear to be running out of steam, the latter seems to be gaining in strength. But there is one basic issue here that both the Congress leadership, the Government of India and the Congress and its allies in Manipur must address quickly: Ibobi Singh has become a huge liability in Manipur. He has been bailed out by Governor SS Sidhu at least twice but took this decision on Integration Day without consulting him.

He must be replaced and soon by a senior political figure from the Imphal Valley if Manipur, walking the tight-rope once again, is to be saved from further tragedy. Then negotiations with ANSAM and other groups can begin. This may be a short-term measure—but it is a legitimate political option. There is another option: President's rule. But that should not be considered if an alternative leader emerges from within the Manipur Congress Party.

Truce renewed

But Naga solution needs compromise

The ceasefire extension in Nagaland by another six months comes as saving grace for NSCN(IM) general secretary Th Muivah, who left Delhi last month after several round of talks failed to make any headway and was reportedly thinking in terms of pulling out of the truce altogether. As in 2004, the ceasefire was renewed on the day its terms were to expire. Last year the NSCN(IM) agreed only after the UPA government dropped the clause in its common minimum programme to maintain the "territorial integrity of north-eastern states", implying no acceptance of the demand for a single administrative unit. The UPA was aware of the implications of such a demand and should have stuck to its guns, but the genial prime minister assured Naga leaders of exploring all possibilities. The previous NDA regime took the NSCN(IM) leadership for a ride by accepting the "uniqueness" of Naga history that they were never under India and assured them of a homeland. More than this, its main objective was to win friends by indulging the NSCN(IM) and it was able to send seven members to the Nagaland assembly in 2003. It also masterminded the fall of the Congress government, in spite of its absolute majority, in Arunachal Pradesh. But the Nagas were left high and dry when Atal Behari Vajpayee told them in October 2003 that the question of a singular unit had to be decided by the people of the three states concerned.

The idea behind NSCN(IM) agreeing to only six months' extension instead of the usual one year is to put pressure on the Centre. But if eight years of truce could achieve nothing, one wonders how this can be settled in the next few months. The comment by former chief minister Hokishe Sema, now a BJP leader, that unification of Naga areas "should not be at the cost of disintegrating other communities and (causing) turmoil in the north-east" may have attracted NSCN(IM) ire but his appears to be a sensible summation of the situation, if peace in the region is to be of overriding concern.

04 AUG 2005

THE STATESMAN

Naga ceasefire to be extended

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, July 31. — The Centre and the major Naga group, NSCN(I-M), have decided to extend the ceasefire for another six months beginning tomorrow in a bid to consolidate the ongoing peace talks between the two sides to resolve the five-decade-old insurgency in Nagaland.

The decision to extend truce was reached after intensive deliberations between the two sides at Amsterdam during 29-30 July, sources said.

The Indian side was represented by Centre's interlocutor on Nagaland, Mr K Padmanabhaiah, and IB joint director Mr Ajit Lal. The Naga leaders were led by the NSCN(I-M) general secretary Mr T Mivah.

The next round of peace talks is likely to be held in Bangkok, sources said.

The ceasefire, which came in force in 1997, has since been renewed every year to facilitate negotiations to bring an end to Asia's longest running insurgency. This is the first occasion that the ceasefire is being extended on a half-yearly basis.

The NSCN(I-M) was said to be upset with the Manipur government's decision to announce holiday on June 18 in support of the bodies which celebrate the day as "Integrity Day".

The group however committed to extend the truce period, which expired today, by another six months after consultations with their colleagues in Bangkok, sources said.

The key demand of NSCN(I-M) is creation of "Greater Nagaland" comprising existing Nagaland and contiguous Naga-inhabited areas of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The majority Meitis in Manipur are against any disintegration and the state had witnessed violent agitation in 2001 when the ceasefire was extended to Manipur and had to be later withdrawn.

Naga students have imposed an indefinite economic blockade in the four hill districts of Manipur since June 20, demanding that the holiday be withdrawn.

1 AUG 2005 THE STATESMAN

Naga imbroglio

By Walter Fernandes

The talks between the leaders of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN-IM) and the Government of India had brought some hope of a solution to the conflict but the Naga leaders have returned to their base, disappointed with their progress.

One is left with the impression that the talks have failed because of the rigid stand of both the sides. Two issues that stand in the way of their success are the integration of all the Naga inhabited areas with Nagalim or Greater Nagaland and a federation with India. The problem can be solved only if both are ready to show some flexibility on these issues.

Only 16 of the 27 Naga tribes live in Nagaland. The rest including the biggest, are spread over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur. The Naga aspiration to unite all of them under a single banner meets with fierce resistance from these states. They want to maintain their territorial integrity. There was bloodshed in June 2001 when the Government of India extended the ceasefire with the NSCN-IM to all Naga-inhabited areas.

The non-Nagas of Manipur viewed it as recognition of Nagalim. The bloodshed that followed is remembered as Martyrs' Day. The emotions these events arouse have become a permanent obstacle to the success of the talks.

During the 2001 crisis, the Naga Hoho (Supreme Tribal Council) went round the North-east explaining its stand to other communities. At one such dialogue with civil society members at Guwahati it realised that no territorial change was acceptable to the neighbouring states and that they had to find a compromise acceptable to all of them.

One of the suggestions was that all the Naga-inhabited areas of the neighbouring states be brought under the Sixth Schedule that makes the formation of the district autonomous councils possible and that the Naga Hoho should have a say in their running. Territorial integrity would thus be preserved but the Naga communities would be united emotionally and would be self-governing within the existing states. One is left with the impression that no such face-saving compromise is being thought of in the present dialogue and that the NSCN-IM and the Government of India have got stuck on terri-

torial integrity. Similar is the fate of a federation which is interpreted as independence.

It is not necessarily the case. The demand for autonomy is strong in much of the North-east that feels dominated by outsiders who control its economy and treat it as a supplier of raw material and buyer of finished products from the rest of India. Also, many states in the rest of India want a federal system to replace the present unitary structure.

The Naga leaders are demanding greater autonomy and more power than such a federal structure would allow. Negotiations seem to have got stuck on a rigid stand around it. One believes that it is possible to get round this block through a creative dia-

Open Forum



Manipur's Senapati district residents put up road blockades. — Robert Sapam

logue on the meaning of a federation in a multi-cultural country like India. The NSCN-IM stand can be a starting point to arrive at compromises, not the end product.

That requires flexibility which is not possible without civil society's involvement. Till now the dialogue has been exclusively between the Government of India and the militant outfits.

Nagaland has many civil society groups like the Naga Women's Organisation and Naga Mothers' Association that have been discussing possible alternatives and have been active in the search for peace. They are following in the footsteps of many Naga tribes in which women have functioned as intermediaries in inter-tribal conflicts. Both the Government of India and the militant outfits,

however, have ignored them. Also, the churches of Nagaland have been trying to bring various tribes together and challenging them to reflect on the type of Nagaland they want.

Their involvement in the dialogue can make a positive difference to the peace process. The Naga People's Movement for Human Rights is in the forefront of denouncing human rights violations by the state and the militants. As a result, both consider it an enemy but its voice is heard with some respect by many Nagas. One can add other groups to the list both within and outside Nagaland but the point one is trying to make is that the vicious circle cannot be broken in a dialogue that does not go beyond the stated positions.

Neither the NSCN-IM nor the Government of India can accept the position of the other unquestioningly. Confidence-building measures that are required for it cannot be built through a dialogue in which the state and a militant outfit are the only interlocutors. A broad social and political base has to be built by involving bodies that have a base in their society. Otherwise, even a solution found through this dialogue can flounder. That is what has happened among the Bodos. The state came to an understanding with one outfit and granted them the Bodo Territorial Council. The other outfit was ignored so were groups belonging to other communities living within their territory.

As a result, the peace they arrived at can at best be called tenuous. Conflicts continue and there was much violence during the recent elections to the Bodo Territorial Council. The Naga dialogue, too, is with one of the two outfits and the other is bound to reject any solution that they may arrive at. The conflict will continue. All of them can be brought to the table only with the help of religious bodies and the civil society.

More importantly, the message of talking only to militant outfits is that the state is ready to talk only when a community resorts to violence. By involving civil and religious bodies, the dialogue can be taken beyond these limits and can lead to creative solutions. Besides, such a solution will be accepted by their society in general. That requires more creativity and greater flexibility than what the two sides have shown till now.

(The author is Director, North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati)

Bangladeshis shape Assam political icons

RAHUL Karmakar
Guwahati, July 25

A FOR Aasu, B for Bangladeshi, C for cut-off date, D for 'D' (doubtful) voters, E for electoral rolls, F for foreigners... Thus read the alphabetical chart in the years that followed the six-year Assam Agitation between 1979 and 1985.

The All Assam Students Union or Aasu—none messes with it in Assam—would have occupied the first spot in this chart by any other name. So would the ubiquitous Bangladeshi, a popular synonym for 'foreigner', 'alien' and 'illegal immigrant', the second spot.

Some 50 lakh Bangladeshis—MHA had aired this figure last year only to retract, while former chief minister Hiteswar Saikia put the number at 40 lakh in the early 1990s—are believed to be the root of all evil in Assam. They are blamed for demographic invasion, spread of Islamic terrorism and the increasing crime rate, though no one grudges the fact that they are a source of cheap labour. But for all their shortcomings, Bangladeshis have invariably had a hand in giving Assam her political icons besides shaping the destinies of political parties, national or regional. And their "influence", direct or indirect, has penetrated other states in the Northeast, too.

The Aasu shot to prominence during the pre-Emergency students' unrest that swept the country in 1974, but it became a force to reckon with after 1979, the year when the movement primarily against Bangladeshi settlers took roots. The anti-alien stir gave Assam a couple of political icons—

Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan.

The signing of the Assam Accord in 1985 led to the formation of the Asom Gana Parishad. It swept the Assembly elections that year, and Mahanta became the country's youngest chief minister with Phukan as his deputy. Differences between gradually saw Phukan being elbowed out of the political centrestage.

Mahanta returned to power a decade later, and this time he had a fair share of the support of immigrants, whom the AGP had virtually overlooked the first time. The change in scenario was understandable; immigrant Muslims are a deciding factor in 35 of the 126 Assembly seats spread across six minority-dominated districts of Assam.

Ousted by the very party he had formed, Mahanta is believed to be a spent force today. And 26 years after he became a household name, his place has been taken by a tribal MP, who had a localised appeal until July 12 this year, the day when the Supreme Court struck down the contentious Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act of 1983. Like Mahanta, Sarbananda Sonowal owes his political ascent to the Bangladeshis. His return to Assam a week after the SC verdict befitted that of a superstar, for it was his petition in April 2000 (he was the Aasu president then) that turned it against the IM(DT) Act. But he was humility personified: "This victory is dedicated to the martyrs of anti-foreigners agitation who had sacrificed their lives for the state and its indigenous population."

JUL 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Truce nightmares

9/2/87 N-E evidence conclusive 5/8/87 ✓

The Centre would be in gross miscalculation if it believes a ceasefire with North-east rebel groups will bring about lasting peace. Barring Meitei insurgents who have refused to sue for peace, Delhi has brokered truce with the Achik National Volunteer Council (Garo Hills), Dima Halam Daoga (Karbi Anglong), National Liberation Front of Tripura and National Democratic Front of Boroland. The Bru (Reang) National Liberation Front recently came to an understanding with the Mizoram government to surrender arms. Peace returned to Mizoram in 1986 after two decades of rebellion but the state had to deal with the Hmar uprising in the 1990s and the BNLF emerged to fight for the rights of those Reangs who fled Mizoram following ethnic riots and are languishing in Tripura refugee camps. Hopefully this will be amicably solved though Aizawl has promised to take back only "genuine" citizens. Admittedly, the ceasefire has brought respite to Nagaland but under its cover militants indulge in rampant extortion by way of collection "tax".

ANVC cadre are said to have tried to endear themselves to locals by organising cricket and football games and contributing an ambulance to a charitable organisation and to the tsunami relief fund. Such intention is laudable but they must be governed by ceasefire ground rules. It is just as well that the Meghalaya government has now thought of confining them to their designated camps. But how long will they stay in and waste their youthful resources? Disappointed, the NLFT leaders disappeared within a few days of signing the ceasefire. The UPA must desist from using the truce for political gain, as the Vajpayee government did. At the same time, it must guard against ceasefire nightmares.

23 JUL 2005

THE STATESMAN

Understanding a controversial legislation

M.S. Prabhakara

THE ILLEGAL Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983, which the Supreme Court recently struck down as unconstitutional, was a Central legislation applicable only to Assam. Prior to its legislation in October 1983, the Foreigners Act, 1946 was the only law dealing with matters relating to the entry of foreigners into India throughout the country.

Among other observations in the judgment, two made towards the end of paragraphs 28 and 42 are noteworthy. "A deep analysis of the IMDT Act and the Rules made thereunder would reveal that they have been purposely so enacted or made so as to give shelter or protection to illegal migrants who came to Assam from Bangladesh on or after 25 March, 1971, rather than to identify or deport them."

Later, after finding mostly on the basis of a report to the President sent by the Governor of Assam on November 8, 1978, that illegal migration from Bangladesh into Assam had led to a situation where Assam was facing "external aggression and internal disturbance," the judgment says: "[T]he provisions of the IMDT Act and the Rules made thereunder clearly negate the constitutional mandate contained in Article 355 of the Constitution, where a duty has been cast upon the Union of India to protect every State against external aggression and internal disturbance. The IMDT Act which contravenes Article 355 of the Constitution is, therefore, wholly unconstitutional and must be struck down."

A brief recapitulation of the background and circumstances of the enactment of the IMDT Act is necessary to understand why and how this contentious and divisive legislation, driven both

While admitting the opportunism that went into the making of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983, the political circumstances that had made it necessary at that point of time cannot be ignored.

by opportunism and necessity, was enacted. For this one has to go back to the unique character of Assam's representativeness, such as it was, in the Seventh Lok Sabha elected in the January 1980 general elections.

When those elections were held, the Assam agitation was in full swing. As part of the agitation programme, there was a call for the boycott of the Lok Sabha elections. In the event, elections could be held only in two constituencies, Silchar and Karimganj (SC), both in the Bengali-dominated Barak Valley where the Assam agitation had little impact or even relevance — then. However, no elections could be held in the remaining 12 constituencies in the Brahmaputra Valley, in 10 of which even nominations were not filed. Other problems were created to ensure that elections could not be held in the other two constituencies as well.

Three years later, when in related, but far more tense and bloody circumstances, the elections to the Assam Assembly were forced through in February 1983, the Election Commission also decided to complete the electoral process in the 12 Lok Sabha constituencies. The farcical nature of these elections is a matter of

record set out in the Report of the State's Chief Electoral Officer and other documents of the Election Commission. Despite all efforts, elections could not be held in seven of the 12 constituencies. In other words, half of the Lok Sabha constituencies, and the majority of the constituencies in the Brahmaputra Valley, remained unrepresented throughout the life of the Seventh Lok Sabha. It was this Lok Sabha that passed the IMDT Act.

It is easy to get indignant about the manipulation of the electoral process, and the invidiousness of the provisions of the IMDT Act that are now anyway history. However, while admitting the opportunism that went into the making of the Act, one also has to consider the political circumstances that made the Act necessary at that point of time. Failing to note this would be surrendering to the populist and dangerous perception that 'politics,' and everything associated with public affairs, is tainted beyond repair and the only alternative is 'non-political politics,' whatever it may mean. This is the way to fascism.

The IMDT Act was passed on October 15, 1983, barely eight months after the bloodstained

elections of February 1983, and received the President's assent on December 25, 1983. Though the carnage was generalised, the majority of the victims were descendants of erstwhile migrants, legally from East Bengal and, after Partition, illegally from East Pakistan and Bangladesh, overwhelmingly Muslim.

Formally, the All Assam Students Union and the political parties and leaders who emerged out of the Assam agitation have always maintained that their agitation made no distinction between an 'infiltrator' (Muslim) and a 'refugee' (Hindu). However, such a distinction, that also reflects a political reality whatever be the normative stand of the AASU, remains central to the national policy, though never clearly spelt out; but more openly acknowledged by the BJP and other parties of the Hindutva persuasion. More crucially, to the extent that the policy has been implemented, this distinction has remained central irrespective of the political and ideological complexion of the Union Government.

This arrangement that had worked with its usual incompetence broke down under the pressure of forces released during the Assam agitation, especially in the face of the repression let loose by the state to control the violence that became an inescapable part of the resistance to the holding of the elections. A semblance of normal voting took place only in minority-dominated constituencies. A government elected on a transparently flawed mandate secured on the strength of the support extended by the minorities had to be responsive to this support base, traumatised in the extreme by the violence it had experienced. This was the political rationale, indeed the political necessity, for the IMDT Act.

True to its culture, this political necessity was implemented with the utmost opportunism and dishonesty that resonate in every word of the legislation, especially its preamble.

This too is history. However, history has its own ways of intruding on the present and setting the agenda for the future in the oddest of ways. One of the points made in the judgment while expatiating on the relative merits of the Foreigners Act, 1946, and the IMDT Act is that in West Bengal where the Foreigners Act applies and where an analogous situation prevails *vis-à-vis* the illegal migration from Bangladesh, many more illegal aliens had been detected and deported than in Assam where the IMDT Act prevails.

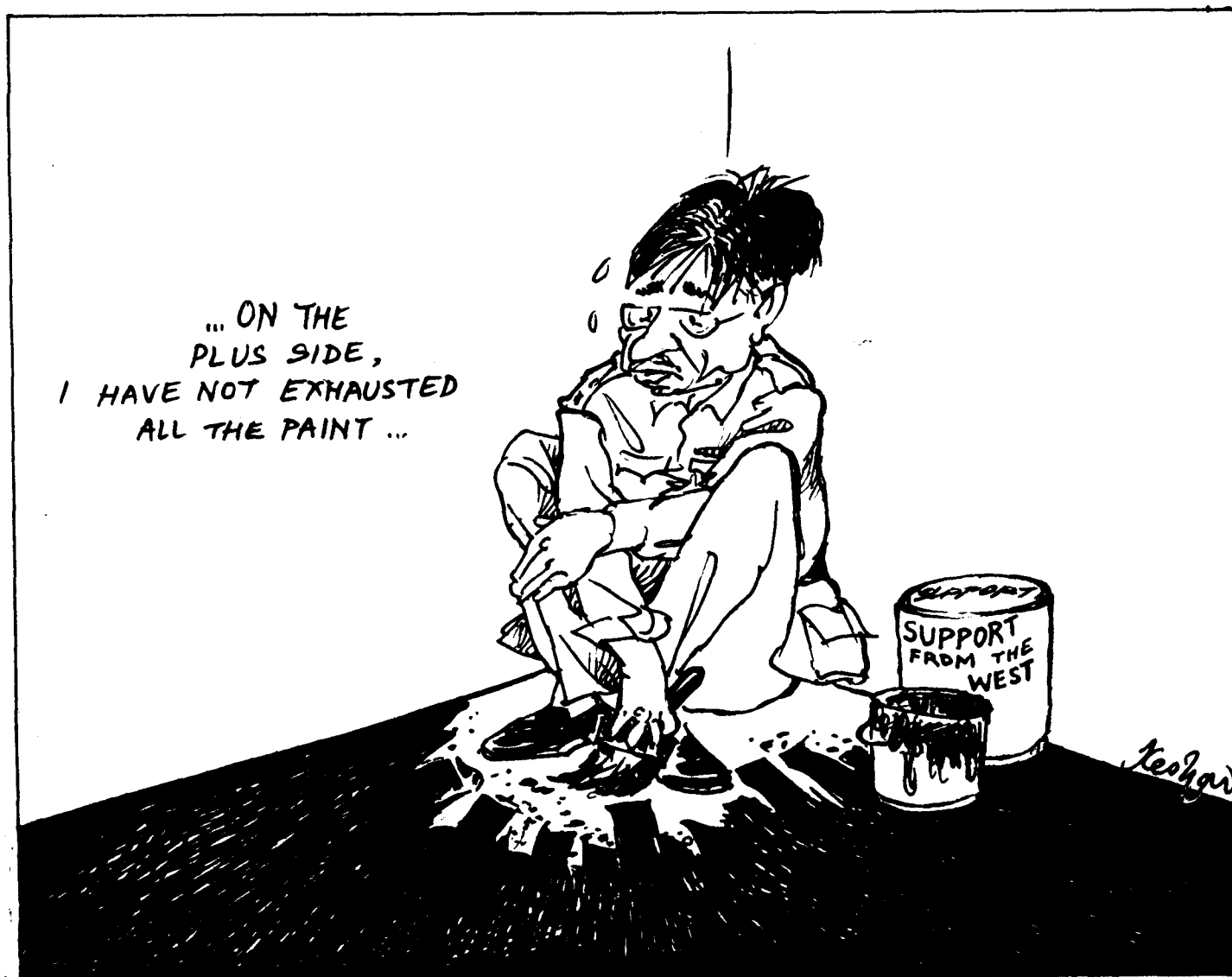
The figures

Inquiries were initiated in 3,10,759 cases under the IMDT Act but only 10,015 were declared as illegal migrants and finally only 1,481 were physically expelled up to April 30, 2000. In West Bengal where the Foreigners Act is applicable, 4,89,046 people were actually deported between 1983 and November 1986, which is a lesser period, and even this result was termed unsatisfactory in the counter affidavit filed by the Union of India.

The key words in the passage are 'physically expelled' used in respect of the 1,481 persons established as illegal migrants in Assam, and 'deported' in respect of the 4,89,046 illegal migrants from West Bengal. Anyone even with the most superficial familiarity with the border regions in Assam (and West Bengal) will see such claims for what they are — little more than figures in records.

The inescapable reality is that the movement of people from Bangladesh into India — and not merely into States bordering Bangladesh — has created an irreversible shift in the balance of forces. No legal or 'informal' methods such as 'push back' across the border at a spot loosely policed on the other side, with the hope that the persons so pushed back will not return, can substantially alter the situation on the ground. Above all, none of these policies takes into account the single-mindedness of the Government (s) of Bangladesh, whose policies *vis-à-vis* this region have had a consistency going back to the period before Partition.

CARTOONSCAPE



Keshav

Manipur fuel starved; schools, colleges closed

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Nothing is available in the State hit by an economic blockade

Iboyaima Laithangbam

IMPHAL: All educational institutions in Manipur were closed indefinitely on Thursday as buses and vans transporting students suspended services for lack of fuel supply. Work in government offices and hospitals has also been disrupted as doctors and officials could not go there.

Virtually nothing is available in Manipur as the All-Naga Students Association of Manipur (ANSAM) has since June 20 clamped an economic blockade demanding the scrapping of the declaration of June 18 as a State integration day holiday.

Thousands of vehicles queued up along the roads leading to petrol pumps three days ahead of scheduled distribution. Rationing increased as the stock dwindled.

Food and Civil Supplies Minister Pheorijam Parijat told *The Hindu* that efforts were on to distribute fuel for school and college vehicles.

The Manipur Government has stopped bringing stranded oil tankers and trucks from Assam via Nagaland with armed escort. Following the blasting of a major bridge along National Highway 53 by militants on Wednesday, hundreds of oil tankers and trucks, which had gone to Assam, could not return to Imphal.

One person was killed and three persons fell into the turbulent Irung river in the impact of the blast on the bridge, which was completely destroyed. It is said the town commander of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak Muivah), in charge of Tamenglong district, was also killed.

The bridge will be reconstructed on a war-footing, a spokesperson of 25 Bn Border Road Task Force told this correspondent. A suspension bridge would be installed by July 24.

All bridges on NH 53 are being guarded.



BLOCKADE FUELS SCARCITY: Two-wheelers line up outside a fuel station in Imphal on Thursday, a day ahead of the rationed supply of petrol. - PHOTO: PTI

In the wake of the blast, Chief Minister Okram Ibobi and Rajya Sabha member Rishang Keishing met on Wednesday. On Thursday, Lok Sabha member Mani Charanamei called on Mr.

Ibobi. Mr. Ibobi has asked Naga leaders and non-governmental organisations to get the blockade lifted. For, there is a possibility of a communal fallout as Manipur has become restive.

The ANSAM has informed the Government that it will participate in talks if Governor S.S. Sidhu meets its members. Mr. Ibobi has said he has no objection to this.

Act of discord deconstructed

Q: What is the IMDT Act?

A: The Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act came into existence on October 15, 1983, at the height of the anti-foreigner agitation launched by the All-Assam Students' Union. It is an instrument for detection of illegal migrants (from Bangladesh) and their expulsion from the state of Assam. While the IMDT Act operates only in Assam, the Foreigners Act (1946) applies to the rest of the country. The IMDT Act is applicable to the Bangladeshi nationals who settled in Assam on or after March 25, 1971.

Q: What does the Act have to do with the Assam Accord?

A: The Assam Accord was signed on August 14, 1985, between former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) leaders to end the anti-foreigner agitation. As per the accord, the foreigners who came to Assam after January 1, 1966, and up to March 24, 1971, would be detected and their names deleted from the electoral rolls. And the foreigners who came on or after March 25, 1971, would be expelled after their detection. A November 1985 amendment to the Indian citizenship law allowed non-citizens who entered Assam between 1966 and 1971 to have all the rights of citizenship except the right to vote for a period of ten years. Critics of the IMDT Act believe that its provisions prevented the implementation of the Assam Accord in full.

Q: What were the controversial provisions of the IMDT Act?

A: Under sub section (I) of Section 8 of the Act, any person may make an application to the tribunal for its decision whether the person whose name and other particulars are given in the application is or is not an illegal immigrant. However, for making such an application, it is conditional that the person/illegal immigrant in relation to whom the application is made, must reside within 3 km from the place of residence of the applicant. Otherwise, the tribunal will not entertain the application. Further, as per the Act, the burden of proving that a person is a foreigner is on the applicant who complains that a particular person is an illegal migrant. The Foreigners Act, 1946, which applies to the rest of India, places the burden of proving a person to be a citizen of India on the suspect.

Q: How does the tribunal work?

A: On receipt of an application, the tribunal issues a notice to the prescribed authority calling upon it to furnish, after making an inquiry, a report to the tribunal with regard to it. If the tribunal is satisfied that the person named in the application is not an illegal migrant or that the application is frivolous or has not been made in good faith, the tribunal after giving the applicant an opportunity to be heard, rejects the application.

If, however, there are reasonable grounds to believe that the person named in the application is an illegal migrant, the tribunal issues a notice to the person named in the application, calling upon him to produce, within 30 days from the date of receipt of the notice, such evidence as he may think fit in support of his defence. Beyond this, there is a provision for two layers of appeal—the Appellant Tribunal as well as the High Court.

Q: How many cases have been pursued under the IMDT Act?

A: According to a Supreme Court observation, 310,759 enquiries were initiated under the IMDT Act, while only 10,015 persons were declared illegal migrants and only 1,481 illegal migrants were physically expelled up to April 30, 2000. It also noted that in the case of West Bengal, where the Foreigners Act was applicable, 489,046 persons were deported between 1983 and November 1999.



LEARNING WITH THE TIMES

8 JUL 2005

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Tribunals to be doubled under Foreigners Act immediately

To dispose of pending cases expeditiously; Gogoi assures protection to minorities

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: After the Supreme Court scrapping the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, the Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi on Saturday said the State Government would carry out the detection and deportation of foreign nationals under the provisions of the Foreigners Act as laid down in the apex court order.

As an immediate measure, the Chief Minister said, the number of tribunals under the Foreigners Act would be doubled to 32 to decide upon the pending cases expeditiously.

Addressing a press conference here, Mr. Gogoi said the Supreme Court verdict had created panic among the minorities who fear harassment in the name of detection of foreigners. Assuring protection to them, he said that genuine Indian citizens should not panic or apprehend any trouble as necessary protection would be granted to them.

He admitted that the detec-

tion and deportation of foreign nationals under the IMDT Act 1983 was very slow and the successive governments in Assam had failed on several counts while implementing it. Till date, he said, only 1,546 foreign nationals had been deported. As many as 4,41,842 enquiries were held of which 1,10,223 were referred to tribunals after scrutiny by the screening committee and 23,938 cases were disposed of.

Accusing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of trying to spread communal disharmony, Mr. Gogoi said the State government was duty bound to maintain law and order, peace and tranquillity in the State. "We will not allow anybody to create communal disharmony. Our government

will not tolerate such attempts by any political party who may try to derive political mileage out of the IMDT issue."

He said it was not the Congress alone which had supported the IMDT Act. The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) had implemented it while in power. "It was only when AGP joined hands with the BJP that it started making noises. Neither the BJP nor the AGP took any concrete measures to detect foreigners, mainly Bangladeshis, and stop further infiltration. He said the AGP-BJP did not hold tripartite talks with the Centre, the Assam Government and the All Assam Students Union (AASU) to stop infiltration. "We have already held [a] tripartite meeting and

- State Government to detect and deport foreign nationals
- Successive governments had failed on several counts while implementing IMDT Act
- AASU lauded for measured response

are taking effective measures to check infiltration at border also," he said.

Lauding the AASU for its measured, mature and responsible reaction to the Supreme Court verdict on the IMDT Act, Mr. Gogoi said that it was wrong to dub all sections of minorities as foreigners. Besides increasing the number of tribunals from the present 16 to 32 under the Foreigners Act, the State Government would also update the National Register of Citizens within next two years.

He said the GoM set up by the Centre to go into the vexed problem of infiltration would consider views of all political parties and groups before reaching a consensus on how to tackle the problem on several fronts. Mr. Gogoi also met the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil and the UPA chairperson and Congress president, Sonia Gandhi. He said the Government has decided not to file a review petition before the Supreme Court.

17 JUL 2005

THE HINDU

Enough's enough

Ibobi must end economic blockade

Imphal Valley residents have become so immune to reports of shooting, extortion, bandh, militant-security force encounters — real or fabricated — and economic blockade that they have learnt to take these in their stride. Nagas, both in Nagaland and Manipur's Senapati district, have, over the past few years, held them to ransom by blockading the main life-line, the 213-km Imphal-Dimapur Road (National Highway 39), and also the Imphal-Silchar Road (NH53), one protest lasting as long as 33 days. Another 45-day blockade called by the Movement for Tribal People's Rights was cut short after the government agreed to look into their demand to send graduate teachers and doctors to the hills. However legitimate this demand might have been, Nagas in Senapati have also "punished" truck owners by burning 25 oil-laden tankers for what they called failure to pay "annual tax".

Incidentally, the NSCN(IM) draws its cadres mostly from Senapati, contiguous to Nagaland. The indefinite highway blockade the All Naga Students Association of Manipur has called since 18 June has already heightened tensions between Nagas and Manipuris. It is in protest against the Manipur government's decision to declare 18 June "State Integrity Day" in memory of those protesters killed in 2001 when the Centre announced the extension of ceasefire to Manipur's four hill districts under the "June 2001 Bangkok accord" with the NSCN(IM). The ANSAM feels this goes against the Nagas' demand for Greater Nagaland. What has added fuel to fire is the declaration of the day as a restricted government holiday. The Ibobi Singh government has to deal carefully with this sensitive issue lest it goes out of hand. There have been reports of mob violence following assault on protesters by security forces. Having twice spurned government feelers for negotiation, the ANSAM is said to be ready for talks at Senapati itself, but only on its terms. The simple answer to the problem, without loss of face, would be for the government to retract its decision and for the ANSAM to promise not to hold public rallies demanding Greater Nagaland.

18 JUL 2005

THE STATESMAN

Centre calls Army to help end Nagaland blockade

Bharti Jain
NEW DELHI 15 JULY

WITH the Nagas' continuing blockade of the Dimapur-Imphal national highway severely cutting off supplies to Manipur, the Centre has turned to the Army to help clear the only alternate route — the Silchar-Imphal highway of Meiti undergrounds — to enable trucks to pass through without facing extortion and other threats.

Though both NH-39 (Dimapur-Imphal) and NH-53 (Silchar-Imphal) connect the land-locked Manipur with other states, it is the former that serves as the life-line of supplies to Imphal. The NH53, on the other hand, is useless given that the Meiti rebels dominate vast stretches of the highway. The Meiti insurgent groups — which include People's Liberation Army (PLA), United National Liberation Front (UNLF) and Manipur Peoples' Liberation Front (MPLF) — are not only known to pose a security threat to supplies and men moving through NH53 but they have also set up "extortion" posts along the highway and demand a hefty fee to let the vehicles pass through.

With the blockade in Manipur showing no signs of ending — there has been virtually no movement of transport vehicles and trucks beyond Nagaland-Manipur border on NH-39 for last several days, even as supplies of essential good and commodities dry up fast in Manipur — Centre has not only asked the Okram Ibobi Singh government to deal firmly

with the Naga protestors on NH-39, but has also brought in the Army to sanitise the NH-53 and enable supplies from Silchar.

The Army has already started clearing the Meiti-dominated stretches of the Assam-Manipur highway. The extortion "checkpoints" are being brought down and the undergrounds manning them, dealt with. The Centre feels that the crack-down upon Meiti extortionists coupled with heightened visibility of the Army along the highway will instil a sense of security and confidence among the truck drivers to start using the route more frequently. The Army will also give a special cover to trucks bringing in essential supplies like oil, etc.

Manipur has been facing a loud protests from the All Naga Students Association of Manipur (ANSAM) ever since the

Ibobi Singh government declared June 18 as a holiday on account of "Integrity Day" in view of the sacrifices made by 18 Manipuris as part of the "great June uprising" of 2001. All of them were killed in a firing as they agitated against extension of the Centre-NSCN(I-M) ceasefire to Manipur. The ceasefire was later withdrawn from the state in view of the violent protests.

The Manipur-based Nagas feel that declaration of "Integrity Day" comes in the way of their demand for integration of all Naga-inhabited areas, including those falling in Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Nagas dominate Ukhrul, Senapati and Tamenglong districts of Manipur.



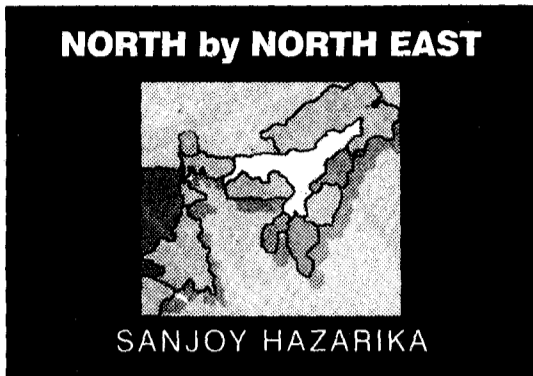
15 JUL 2005

The Economic Times

To the dustbin of history

In a stinging indictment of the Congress and its supporters, which have long battled to retain an illegal law which enables illegal migration to take place and ties the hands of authorities, the Supreme Court has banished the Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunal Act to where it belongs — the dustbin of history.

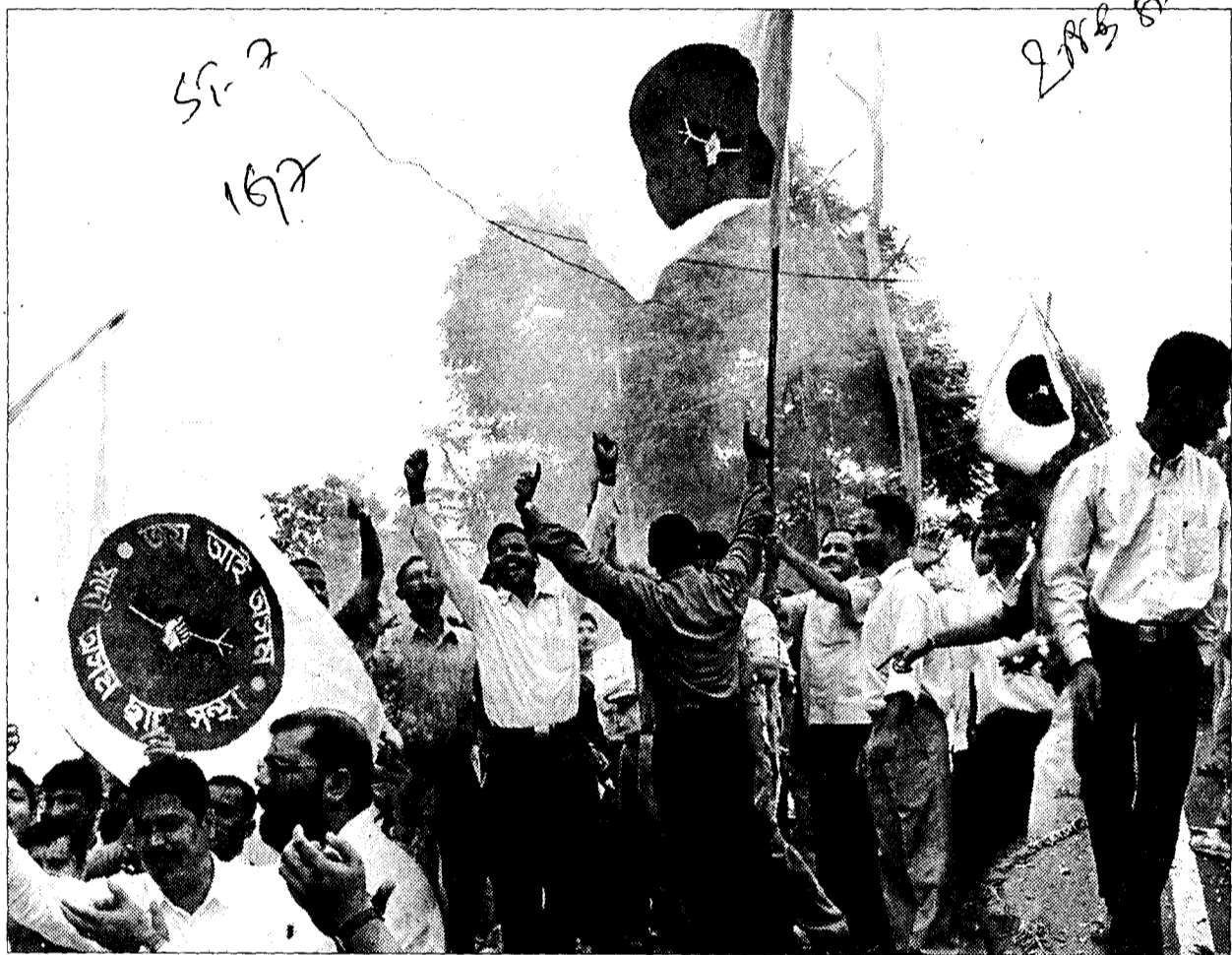
There was great jubilation in many parts of Assam, with people thronging the streets in universities and outside colleges, especially near the offices of the All Assam Students' Union and the



Bench headed by the Chief Justice, Mr RC Lahoty, flew in the face of international laws on the problem of

there is concern in "minority" (read Bengali-speaking Muslim areas) about the impact of the Supreme Court judgment and there even has been a two-day bandh called in areas where the writ of the minorities runs. How will they live and work? Will they be harassed? These are genuine questions before genuine citizens and no amount of political statements will assuage their concerns.

So, I go back to Mr Mahajan, former minister and now secretary of the BJP, that Bengali-speaking "genuine" Indian Muslims will not be affected by the BJP charge.



All Assam Students' Union leaders and their supporters celebrate after the Supreme Court struck down the controversial IMDT Act in Guwahati on Tuesday. — Eastern Projections

Asom Gana Parishad, the principal fighters against the tide of immigration and the Centre's stupidities to ignore local concerns to pander to political whims.

Sarbananda Sonawal, the former AASU president and now MP Dibrugarh, basked in the media limelight as was only right — it was his lone battle over five years in the highest court of the land, aided by fine legal support, that brought about this historic judgment.

That Johnny come lately, the BJP, also wasted little time in celebrating the event as did the various splinter groups which make up its support base.

The Act, declared the three-judge

migration, which are based on the sound principle that the person charged with illegal entry has to prove his or her bona fides and not the party which makes the charge.

This is a point that we have repeatedly stressed in this column and on this page — that the IMDT truly made history by standing internationally recognised norms of detecting and dealing with illegal entry into a country on its head.

"Presence of such a large number of illegals from Bangladesh, which runs into millions, was in fact an 'aggression' on the state of Assam and has also contributed serious 'internal disturbances' in the shape of insurgency of alarming proportion making life of the people of Assam insecure and the panic generated thereby has created fear psychosis," the order said.

The application of the IMDT, the judgement remarked, had made the life of detecting and deporting foreign nationals difficult and it was in fact "coming to the advantage of such illegal migrants as any proceedings against them entirely ends in their favour, enables them to have a document having official sanctity to the effect that they are not illegal migrants".

SO, it may be said that the wheels of justice grind exceedingly slow but they do grind. The Supreme Court has done what its Parliament should have done. I was reminded of this during a television discussion with Pramod Mahajan of the BJP and Digvijay Singh of the Congress on Thursday night. Hosted by Karan Thapar, I was the unseen but heard third factor or person in the discussion. Time and again, Karan, who can be one of the toughest inquisitors on television that one can ask for, asked Mr Mahajan why his party had failed to do anything about repealing the IMDT.

We got the usual stuff about lack of numbers and of trying to get it through Parliament. But Mr Mahajan said nothing about the fact that the BJP or the NDA, take your pick, tabled the issues in the last session of Parliament when everyone knew that elections were nigh and that nothing really of importance would get done and that this issue would not get through the business of Parliament.

There are some other questions to be concerned here. There may be jubilation in many parts of Assam about the ouster of the IMDT. But

Let us pause for a moment and reflect on the powerful effect that a group of student leaders in little Assam had on India — AASU and the charge of the 1980s when governments were on bended knees to agitations demanding the ouster of the illegal immigrants.

That the Asom Gana Parishad, the natural successor to the AASU, should have taken a more pragmatic approach to the question of migration is hardly surprising — after all, especially in its second term, it depended on immigrant votes for its majority.

This then raises a major and critical issue: even after the brouhaha of the Supreme Court verdict has died down, what do you do about the 20 lakh or two million so-called Bangladeshis left in Assam and the not less than 15 million (some say 20 million) in India?

Can they be ousted by force of law? By the strong arm of the police and the state?

One doubts it. And this is where the problem does not go away. And again, this is where it is critical for us to take a pragmatic approach and see what can be done and what cannot. No government worth its salt will bring on its head a new law and order problem by trying to throw out Bangladeshis. So after, the National Register of Citizens is readied, let there be a system of identity cards for residents and nationals as well as work permits for those who want to come. This would give control over migrants, by ensuring that they do not illegally settle and acquire citizenship.

It is time that we stopped beating the drum about how right we were about the IMDT.

It is also time for the Government of India to stop its headlong rush to confrontation with the people of Assam by trying to find a way out of the situation and challenging the Supreme Court order. Nothing could be worse for its own position, bad enough as it is.

Let them honour the struggle for peoples rights, let them honour history. But more important, let them learn it — and the principal lesson is that people, whether of Assam or elsewhere, do not like to be taken for granted. The problem has not gone away: it has only gone for the time being and we need to understand how to develop policies that will tackle the medium and long-term challenges. Just shouting "illegal immigration" and "deportation" will not do.

A crisis a fortnight for Manipur

By Pradip Phanjoubam

Manipur's predicament is pitiable at this moment. It has become a rule rather than exception that practically every second week it is shocked out of complacency by a new crisis.

One fine morning the place would explode on the issue of custodial killing; then another day priceless libraries would go up in flames on the language issue; in the following days, it would be violent agitations for the removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act; then it would be outcries over kidnapping for ransom; then threats to territorial integrity; or blockades of highways on any other conceivable excuse. The list is endless as much as it is unpredictable. All of this as the government indulges in its favourite diplomacy of wait and watch. There does not seem to be anything as pro-active measure in the government's vocabulary.

Just a week ago, the issue that dominated headlines was mass resignation by 230 engineers of the state public works department, complaining of unbearable extortion pressures on them from various underground organisations. The immediate trigger for their extreme step was the shooting and injuring of an executive engineer, RK Mobisana, at his residence for extortion-related matters. But even as this crisis concluded after assurance by the chief minister, Mr Okram Ibobi, that they would be given comprehensive security cover, another exploded to take its place.

This time Mr Ibobi got himself caught in a labyrinth of his own making. Quite on his own, obviously on the advice of his kitchen cabinet, (he did not take the advice of his official Cabinet) he had declared a state holiday on 18 June, the day 18 people died protesting against the extension of the NSCN(IM)-Government of India ceasefire without territorial limits, naming it "Integrity Day". He probably thought he was playing to a cheering gallery in the hope of electoral gains, but to his dismay, the move is turning out to be another nightmare he is not sure how to handle. Naga civil society bodies, who feel this is an official insult to the Naga aspiration for a greater unified Naga homeland, are now literally up in arms, demanding through the familiar coercive means of economically blockading the state, that he retract the decision.

There can be nothing wrong with a state government head opposing disintegration of the state, but the holiday overture, although a symbol of this belief, is today acquiring the hue of insult to injury for the Nagas in the state because of its ill-timing. Mr Ibobi is only asking for trouble by stirring the hornet's nest. How the chief minister must now be wishing he could swallow his words, as he has done so many times before, the latest of which was during the script-switch agitation. His obvious fear

Open Forum

would be this time he could end up swallowing more than he intends to. A capitulation now can make him appear like a spineless betrayer of Manipur amongst the zealous campaigners of the state's territorial integrity. On the other hand, the latter just may not be bothered, after all this is not a holiday they had called for, and holiday or not, their commitment would remain just the same. Perhaps, it would do well for the chief minister to gauge their mood and think of an exit strategy.

But the holiday is just the immediate trigger to a problem that runs much deeper for it is latched to the question of a greater and sovereign Naga homeland which has within its map territories of states neighbouring Nagaland, besides the state of Nagaland. Even if the chief minister were to withdraw the holiday and the blockade concludes, the problem would remain waiting to blow up into a crisis again sooner than later.

The situation is reminiscent of a Manipuri saying that it is impossible to wake up somebody who is not asleep or is only pretending to be asleep. Hence, solving the holiday issue cannot be the end of the problem although it can delay the crisis.

But delaying may be vital at this point so that some breathing room is created during which a resolution to the larger problem can be thought of and negotiated. The crisis worsened on 9 July evening, when two personnel of the India Reserve Battalion, IRB posted at Senapati beat up two local supporters of the economic blockade, inflicting a gunshot injury on the shoulder of one of the victims; after a reported drunken brawl.

As to what provoked the assault is not known, but the two IRB personnel have been suspended from service pending a probe. Widescale violence followed the next day in four Naga-inhabited districts, and 10 government offices ended up torched by angry crowds.

The episode was unfortunate, but expected. It was something that was waiting to happen. Amidst the tension that had come to engulf the state, a single spark was all that was needed for fires to literally break out.

The prayer today in Manipur is that things do not spiral out of control for there is no hiding from the fact that the state has still not come out of the dangerous and ignitable atmosphere of ethnic tension.

Under the circumstance, there can also be no guarantee whatsoever that there would be no more sparks of the kind that outraged the public in the four hill districts, capable of making the state explode into another inferno. The question is, what now? Only a few days ago, the All Naga Students' Association Manipur, ANSAM, the organisation spearheading the blockade, did show willingness to negotiate a truce with the government of Manipur.

Overt posturing prevented results. The students' body wanted the chief minister to come to their office in Senapati rather than their making the trip to the latter's office to attempt a settlement of the issue.

One can only hope everything is not lost yet, and some sanity would prevail so that whatever the nature of the outstanding issues are, even if they are extreme, can be pursued and settled with cool heads and not amidst the debris of violent confrontations.

(The author is Editor of Imphal Free Press.)



Illegal migrants in Assam will not be harassed, says Minister

GoM to discuss situation arising from quashing of Act

J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI: Union Law Minister H.R. Bhardwaj on Friday said illegal Bangladeshi migrants in Assam "will not be harassed" following the Supreme Court order striking down as unconstitutional the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act, 1983.

Addressing a press conference, Mr. Bhardwaj said a Group of Ministers had been formed to deal with the situation after the quashing of the IMDT Act. "I

have already spoken to the Chief Minister of Assam, Tarun Gogoi, and will hold talks with MPs, MLAs and all the parties concerned to amicably resolve the issue."

The Minister made it clear that the Centre would enforce the Foreigners Act in Assam. But "I assure that there will not be any harassment of anyone, including Indian citizens. The Tribunals under the Foreigners Act will go into the issue in accordance with law." No drastic steps could be taken against illegal migrants as

human rights was involved.

On amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code, the Minister said a delegation of lawyers led by president of the Madras High Court Advocates' Association S. Prabhakaran had given a representation expressing their apprehension over certain provisions. The Amendment Act, which received the President's assent on June 23, would not be notified till the objections from the lawyers were considered by the Government and steps taken to allay their fears.

FRIDAY, JULY 15, 2005

A divisive issue persists in Assam

The striking down by the Supreme Court of the contentious and deeply divisive Central legislation, the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act of 1983, as unconstitutional may not mean the end to the more basic issues that lie behind the political necessity and opportunism that gave birth to the legislation. That the Act was on the statute books for more than two decades before it was found to run foul of the Constitution is just one indication of the profound contradictions that underlie the functioning of the executive, legislative, and judicial organs of the Indian state. The relatively lenient IMDT Act was made applicable solely to Assam while the more stringent Foreigners Act, 1946 applied in the rest of the country. The nub of the argument of the opponents of the legislation who constitute an important and influential segment of the State's population is that it unduly favours those 'foreign nationals' (meaning Bangladeshis) suspected to be illegally staying in the State. The procedure for the three 'D's, (detection, deletion of names from electoral rolls, and deportation) was seen to be hamstrung by the provision that cast the onus of proving a suspected person to be an illegal migrant on the state or individual who lodged the complaint. The procedure under the Foreigners Act is more summary and direct, with the onus being on the person impugned to be an alien to establish her or his Indian nationality. From an analysis of the working of the IMDT Act in Assam, the Supreme Court found that it had been wholly ineffective and working to the advantage of illegal migrants: of the 310,759 cases enquired into, only in 10,015 the persons concerned were declared illegal aliens and just 1,481 of them were physically expelled up to the end of April 2000. In contrast, in West Bengal where the Foreigners Act applies, 489,046 persons were deported between 1983 and 1998. The Court saw the presence of millions of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh as amounting to aggression against Assam and also as a cause of serious internal disturbances. The enactment was therefore found to be negating the Centre's duty under Article 355 to protect the State from external aggression and internal disturbance.

The IMDT Act was brought into being in the context of the ethnic, linguistic, and religious antagonisms that are rooted in history. They culminated in the infamous forced and bloodstained elections to the Assam Assembly of February 1983 and the accompanying carnage. However, the special circumstances of its birth far from 'contextualising' the law, made its invidious features all the more glaring. In an unusual departure from its traditional reserve and going beyond legal reasoning, the Supreme Court has entered the debate on the politically divisive foreigners' issue in the State. Asserting that millions of Bangladeshi nationals had migrated illegally, it says their presence has made the life of the people of Assam "wholly insecure" and hampered the State's growth. The Court has further opined that as the rest of the country saw the State as a disturbed area, there were no investments and employment opportunities; and this in turn led to an insurgency. The immediate impact of the Supreme Court's ruling is that, as directed in the judgment, all existing Tribunals under the IMDT Act will have to be reconstituted under the provisions of the Foreigners Act. Finally, the judgment clearly marks a setback to the Congress, which has unwisely made the retention of the IMDT Act the central plank of its political programme in the State. However, the triumphalism of the opponents of the Act following its annulment has the potential for adversely affecting communal harmony — such as still remains. //

15 JUL 2005

THE HINDU

আইএসআইকে উৎসাহ দিয়েছে আইন, কেন্দ্রকে ভৎসনা সুপ্রিম কোর্টের

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার নম্বাদিল্লি, ১৪ জুলাই: আইএমডিটি আইন খারিজ করতে গিয়ে অসম তথা দেশের নিরাপত্তা নিয়ে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের মনোভাবকেই প্রশ্নের মুখে দাঁড় করিয়ে দিয়েছে সুপ্রিম কোর্ট। সর্বোচ্চ আদালতের রায় এই আইনটিকেই শুধু 'অসাংবিধানিক' আখ্যায় দেয়নি, বিভিন্ন সরকারি নথি ও রিপোর্ট থেকে উদ্ধৃত করে প্রধান বিচারপতি আর সি লাহোটির নেতৃত্বাধীন ডিভিশন বেঞ্চ কেন্দ্রকে কড়া ভাষায় ভৎসনা করেছে।

সাম্প্রতিক এই রায়ে সুপ্রিম কোর্ট পরিষ্কার বলেছে, বাইরের আগ্রাসন থেকে অসমকে রক্ষা করা কেন্দ্রের কর্তব্য। আইএমডিটি আইন চালু করে সেই কাজটাই ঠিক ভাবে সারেনি তারা। উল্টে আইনটি সংবিধানের ৩৫৫ ধারাকে অগ্রাহ্য করছে, উৎসাহ যুগিয়েছে অনুপ্রবেশে। এই সূত্রেই সুপ্রিম কোর্ট বলেছে অনুপ্রবেশ থেকে সীমান্তের ও পারে আই এস আই মদতপুষ্ট মুসলিম জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠীগুলির রমরমার কথা। পরিসংখ্যান দিয়ে দেখিয়েছে, অনুপ্রবেশকারী শনাক্ত করে ফেরত পাঠানোর ক্ষেত্রে আইএমডিটি-র কার্যকারিতা কতটা কম। দেখিয়েছে, ক্রমাগত অনুপ্রবেশ বদলে দিয়েছে অসমের জনসংখ্যার মানচিত্রটাই। সর্বোচ্চ আদালত বলেছে, বহু জেলায় এখন এমন অবস্থা যে, অসমের মূল বাসিন্দারাই সেখানে সংখ্যালঘু।

১৯৯৮ সালে অসমের তৎকালীন রাজ্যপাল এস কে সিংহের রিপোর্ট থেকে উদ্ধৃতি দিয়েছে সুপ্রিম কোর্ট। রাজ্যের অনুপ্রবেশ পরিস্থিতি যে আশঙ্কাজনক অবস্থায় পৌঁছেছে, কেন্দ্রকে পাঠানো সেই রিপোর্টে এ কথাই বলেছিলেন রাজ্যপাল। সুপ্রিম কোর্ট বলেছে, এস কে সিংহ এক জন অবসরপ্রাপ্ত সেনাকর্তা। তিনি বুঝছিলেন পরিস্থিতি কতটা উদ্বেগের। বাংলাদেশ থেকে লাখে লাখে মানুষ চুকেছে অসমে। এ দিকে পাক গুপ্তচর সংস্থা আই এস আইয়ের মদতে বাংলাদেশে ব্যাঙের ছাতার মতো গজিয়ে উঠেছে মুসলিম জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠী। অনুপ্রবেশ সহজ হওয়ায় তারা অসমে অভ্যন্তরীণ গোলমাল বাধাতে সক্ষম হয়েছে।

সরকারেরই জনগণনা রিপোর্ট থেকে সুপ্রিম কোর্ট দেখিয়েছে, ১৯৫১ থেকে ১৯৯১ সালের মধ্যে অসমে মুসলিম জনসংখ্যা বেড়েছে ৭৭.৪২ শতাংশ। সেখানে হিন্দু জনসংখ্যার বৃদ্ধি ৪১.৮৯ শতাংশ। একই সঙ্গে ১৯৯৭ সালে সংসদে তৎকালীন কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী ইন্দ্রজিৎ গুপ্তের একটি হিসাবেরও উল্লেখ করা হয়েছে এই রায়ে। ইন্দ্রজিৎবাবু বলেছিলেন, পশ্চিমবঙ্গে অনুপ্রবেশকারীর সংখ্যা ৫৪ লক্ষ আর অসমে ৪০ লক্ষ।

সুপ্রিম কোর্ট বলেছে, এই হারে অনুপ্রবেশ বাইরে থেকেই শুধু নয়, অসমে অভ্যন্তরীণ আগ্রাসনের পরিস্থিতিও তৈরি করেছে। অবস্থা সামলাতে আইএমডিটি কতটা কার্যকর? সুপ্রিম কোর্টের রায়ে সেই ব্যাখ্যাও রয়েছে। সর্বোচ্চ আদালত দেখিয়েছে, '৭১ থেকে ২০০০ সালের এপ্রিল পর্বন্ত অসমে মোট ৩ লক্ষ ১০ হাজার ৭৫৯টি অনুপ্রবেশকারী সংক্রান্ত মামলা হয়েছে। কিন্তু অনুপ্রবেশকারী হিসাবে চিহ্নিত করে সীমান্ত পার করিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে ১৪৮১ জনকে। যা মোট মামলার আধ শতাংশও নয়। এই সব তথ্য দিয়ে সর্বোচ্চ আদালতের পরিষ্কার বক্তব্য, অনুপ্রবেশকারীদের শনাক্ত করে তাদের সীমান্ত পার করে দেওয়ার ক্ষেত্রেই বড় বাধা হয়ে দাঁড়িয়েছে এই আইন।

অনুপ্রবেশ অন্যায়

প্রতিবেশী রাষ্ট্র হইতে বেআইনি অনুপ্রবেশ ভারতের একটি দীর্ঘমেয়াদি সমস্যা। বিশেষত ধর্মীয় আনুগত্যের ভিত্তিতে বিভক্ত উপমহাদেশে ভারত প্রথমাবধি সাবেক পূর্ব পাকিস্তান, অধুনা বাংলাদেশ হইতে শরণার্থী শ্রোতে আক্রান্ত হওয়ায় এই সমস্যা জটিল আকার ধারণ করে। সারা দেশে প্রযোজ্য বিদেশি নাগরিক আইন বলবৎ করিয়া অনুপ্রবেশকারীদের শনাক্ত করার বন্দোবস্ত থাকিলেও তাহাতে অনুপ্রবেশ রোধ করা যায় নাই। অসমের মতো যে সব রাজ্যে বাংলাদেশ হইতে অনুপ্রবেশকারীরা ব্রহ্মপুত্র উপত্যকায় স্থায়ী আস্তানা গাড়িয়া সেখানকার জনবিন্যাসের কাঠামোই পাল্টাইয়া ফেলার উপক্রম করে, সেখানে স্বভাবতই সমাজে ইহার তীব্র বিরূপ প্রতিক্রিয়া সৃষ্টি হয়। সেই প্রতিক্রিয়া অসম আন্দোলনের চেহারা লইয়া আশির দশকে হিংসাত্মক হইয়া ওঠে এবং নেলি গণহত্যার মতো সংখ্যালঘু-নিধনের বিপর্যয় ঘটয়া যায়। এই পরিস্থিতিতেই অসমের জন্য টাইবুনালের মাধ্যমে বেআইনি অনুপ্রবেশকারী শনাক্তকরণ আইন (আই এম ডি টি) প্রণীত হয়। সুপ্রিম কোর্ট আইনটি রদ করিয়া অবশিষ্ট দেশে প্রযোজ্য বিদেশি নাগরিক আইনই অসমের ক্ষেত্রেও প্রয়োগ করার সুপারিশ করিয়াছে। কেন্দ্র ও অসমে ক্ষমতাসীন কংগ্রেস সরকারই যেহেতু আইনটি প্রণয়ন করিয়াছিল, তাই বর্তমানে এই দুই স্থলেই ক্ষমতাসীন কংগ্রেস এই রায়ে বিপাকে পড়িয়াছে।

রদ হওয়া আইনটিতে অভিযোগকারীকে প্রমাণ করিতে হইত যে অভিযুক্ত ব্যক্তি অনুপ্রবেশকারী। এবং অভিযুক্ত একটি রেশন কার্ড দেখাইয়াই নিজেকে ভারতীয় নাগরিক প্রমাণ করিতে পারিতেন। এই পরিচয়পত্রটি সংগ্রহ করা এ দেশে অতি সহজ। বস্তুত রাজনৈতিক দলগুলি ভোটের বাড়াইবার আগ্রহে অনুপ্রবেশকারীদের এই পরিচয়পত্র দিবার জন্য মুখাইয়া থাকে। এ ভাবেই পশ্চিমবঙ্গের সীমান্তবর্তী জেলাগুলিতে ধর্মীয় সংখ্যালঘুবা সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ হইয়া উঠিয়াছেন। সমস্যাটির কথা মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বুদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্যও অবহিত। অসমে অনুপ্রবেশ আরও ব্যাপক। অথচ আই এম ডি টির দৌলতে টাইবুনালে বিদেশি শনাক্তকরণ ও বহিষ্কার শমুক গতিতে অগ্রসর হইত। কংগ্রেসের অনুশীলন করা ভোটের রাজনীতি ক্রমে অসম আন্দোলনের সংগঠক অগপ'ও অনুসরণ করিতে থাকে। নিজের গণভিত্তি বাড়াইতে এই দলও সংখ্যালঘু তোষণের পথ লয়। আর তাহার ফাঁকেই অসমে অনুপ্রবেশ অব্যাহত থাকে, সংখ্যালঘুর সংখ্যাও বাড়িতে থাকে।

দেশের অন্য রাজ্যগুলিতে অনুপ্রবেশকারীদের জন্য এক নিয়ম, আর অসমে আর এক। অসমে থাকিয়া-থাকিয়াই বিভিন্ন জেলায় সংখ্যালঘুদের উপর আক্রমণ নামিয়া আসে। তাহাতে ধর্মীয় বিচারে সংখ্যালঘু অথচ বৈধ নাগরিকরাও অকারণ হয়রানির শিকার হইতেছেন। রাজ্য জুড়িয়া সাম্প্রদায়িক বিদ্বেষ ও হানাহানির আশঙ্কা বৃদ্ধি পাইতেছে। নেলি গণহত্যার মতো অপকাণ্ডের পুনরাবৃত্তির শঙ্কাও মূর্ত হইয়া উঠিতেছে। তাই অনুপ্রবেশ সমস্যারও একটা বিহিত হওয়া দরকার। সামনে বিধানসভার নির্বাচন আসিতেছে বলিয়া ভোটমনস্ক সিদ্ধান্ত লইলেও চলিবে না। রাজ্য ও দেশের স্বার্থে যাহা করণীয়, তাহাই করা উচিত। বেআইনি অনুপ্রবেশ যে কোনও মূল্যেই রোধ হওয়া উচিত। অনুপ্রবেশকারীরা যে দেশের সীমাবদ্ধ সম্পদে ভাগ বসাইতেছে, তাহাতে সন্দেহ নাই। উন্নয়নশীল ভারতে এমনিতেই এ সম্পদের নাগাল সকল রাজ্যের সর্ব স্তরের মানুষ পায় না। উপরন্তু অনুপ্রবেশকারীদের বাড়তি বোঝা দুঃসহ। জাতীয় নিরাপত্তার প্রস্তুতিও উপেক্ষণীয় নয়। শরণার্থীর আড়ালে কোথায় জেহাদি সন্ত্রাসবাদীরা ঢুকিতেছে, কে তাহার হিসাব লইবে? উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলের অগ্নিগর্ভ নিরাপত্তা পরিস্থিতির নিরিখে আশু ব্যবস্থা তাই জরুরি। সুখের বিষয়, প্রধানমন্ত্রী ইতিমধ্যেই বিকল্প আইনি ব্যবস্থা খতাইয়া দেখিতে উচ্চপর্যায়ের একটি কমিটি গঠন করিয়াছেন।

ANADABAZAR PATTIKA

Assam Act repeal goes for review

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 14

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PRIME MINISTER Manmohan Singh on Thursday decided to set up a group of ministers (GoM) to study the Supreme Court ruling on the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983.

"The GoM will hear the views of various parties and advise the government on the future course of action", home minister Shivraj Patil said after a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs. The SC had, on Tuesday, struck down the Act as unconstitutional.

In the judgment, the court likened illegal migration into Assam from Bangladesh to "external aggression". It flayed the Centre for failing in its duty under Article 355 to protect the state from such a situation.

The SC added that there were no restrictions on the Centre to expel foreigners: "The government's powers to expel foreigners is absolute". Quoting figures, the Bench observed that application of the Act in Assam was the main impediment to identifying and deporting illegal migrants. Taking note of the fact that the presence of a large number of illegal migrants had taken the shape of an insurgency, the SC asked the Centre to take steps to identify and deport them.

In no way does international law prohibit en masse expulsion of aliens, the court stated. "Thus, Bangladesh nationals who have illegally crossed the border into Assam, or are living in other parts of the country, have no legal right of any kind to remain in India and are liable to be deported", the Bench observed.

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THE HINDU

IMDT Act: Assam's real villain

State counts its gains, and losses

RAHUL Karmakar
Guwahati, July 14

IN AN anti-minority drive in the months of May and June, some 10,000 suspected Bangladeshis fled Dibrugarh town and outskirts of eastern Assam. The drive, predictably, fizzled out. But not before rattling the ruling Congress, strengthening the BJP's rhetoric against Bangladeshi Muslims (Hindus from across the border are acceptable to the party) and putting the regional Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) in a dilemma—it was aware of the electoral strength of the Muslims, who are a deciding factor in 35 Assembly constituencies in Assam, with the next polls slated for early 2006.

So, why did the drive against the illegal migrants peter out? The Tarun Gogoi administration lauded itself for prompt handling of the situation, but the Aasu and AJYCP blamed it on the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act of 1983.

Though applicable to the entire country, the IM (DT) Act was implemented only in Assam. An instrument for detecting and ejecting illegal immigrants who settled in Assam on or after March 25, 1971, IM (DT) made the Foreigners' Act of 1946, applicable to the rest of the country, redundant. Consequently, 11 courts under the Foreigners' Act and the Foreigners (Tribunal) Order of 1964 were left in the lurch with 26,124 foreigners identified between 1966 and 1971. These foreigners have become traceless. The basic difference between the Foreigners Act and IM (DT) is that the former puts the onus of

proving one's citizenship on the person identified as an alien while the latter made it mandatory for the complainant to prove the nationality of a person accused as an illegal immigrant. Investigative authorities and those opposed to the IM (DT) found it unwieldy and impractical. In a way, IM (DT) was Assam's Ayodhya, an issue to be cashed in on politically. IM (DT) was not a problem of Assam alone; Arunachal Pradesh registered an astronomical decadal increase in Muslim immigrant population of over 80 per cent.

"The Supreme Court verdict on striking down IM (DT) will help prevent Assam from being turned into another Bangladesh or Pakistan," said AGP Parliamentarian Sarbananda Sonowal who, as the Aasu president, had challenged the validity of IM (DT) in the apex court. The AGP euphoria is understandably subdued for it has been enjoying a sizeable chunk of the Muslim votes.

But political observers in Assam feel the AGP could gain more from the IM (DT) verdict than the BJP, which has been virtually robbed of a political issue.

The biggest beneficiary, however, could be the Congress. Without any option, Muslims are likely to polarise in its favour. Maintaining that minorities in Assam would be targets of 1983-style xenophobia, the Aamsu has vowed to find a way out—bandhs are a beginning. "If Tada could change to Pota, there's no reason why IM (DT) cannot be reincarnated," said a minority leader on condition of anonymity. Only time will tell.



All Assam Students' Union members celebrate the Supreme Court's verdict scrapping the IMDT Act.

PTI

Aasu urges communal amity

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, July 14

THE ALL Assam Students Union (AASU) warned on Thursday all communal forces and political parties not to flare up "communal tension" in the state in the name of detecting and deporting illegal Bangladeshi migrants.

AASU president Sankar Prasad Ray said that after the Supreme Court's verdict on IM(DT) Act, communal forces and some political parties are trying to create "communal ten-

sion" in the state. Fearing communal flare up in sensitive areas of the state, the state government on Wednesday clamped prohibitory orders under section 144 CrPC in Cachar, Dhubri and Barpeta district of the state.

Last Tuesday, the Supreme Court declared as unconstitutional the IM(DT) Act, which provided legal protection to illegal Bangladeshi migrants in Assam.

Terming the SC verdict as victory of people of the state and martyrs of Assam movement, Ray said that SC verdict only

cleared hurdles in implementing all the clauses of the Assam Accord but the illegal Bangladeshi migrants' problem is yet to solve.

According to the Assam Accord, migrants of any religion who entered Assam after March 24, 1971 must leave the state and those who entered Assam before the cut off date can be allowed to stay in the state.

The AASU president alleged that after the verdict, some political parties spread the message in minority areas that Muslims would be deported from Assam.

JUL 14

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Welcome decision

IM(DT) Act has lost relevance

The election issue of most political parties has been killed with the Supreme Court quashing the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act 1983. For the Congress, which has been opposing its repeal on the grounds that it safeguarded the interests of the minority community (its vote bank), the verdict is a big blow, particularly now that the assembly elections are just 10 months away. The main objection to the Act was that it was discriminatory, applicable only in Assam whereas the law was meant for the entire country. The Act wasn't so much discriminatory as was the fact that successive governments at the Centre did little to extend it to other states. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh recently said the Act was good but it should have been uniformly used. Had this been done, perhaps the powerful All Assam Students' Union, which has all along been demanding its withdrawal, would have had no reason to be vociferous. Other objections to the Act were that the onus of proof of one's nationality lay with the complainant, not the migrant; that one had to pay a fee of Rs 10 for doing a "patriotic" duty, and that the complainant could not reach out beyond his own police station area.

In a sense, the Act has lost its relevance. Some leaders seem to think the volatile situation that existed when the Aasu was riding the anti-foreigners' crest that prompted the Centre to enact the law no longer exists. As per the 1985 Assam Accord, the Act was amended twice but could make little progress in terms of detection, disenfranchisement and deportation. Illegal migrants must be ousted but the authorities must guarantee that no genuine Indian citizens are harassed in the detection process.

JUL 2
THE STATESMAN

SC indicts Centre for constitutional failure

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, July 14. — Pointing out a major constitutional failure, the Supreme Court has ruled that the Centre has not done its duty to protect Assam from "external aggression" due to the continuance of the IMDT Act, thereby encouraging rampant illegal migration from Bangladesh.

Striking down the IMDT Act as unconstitutional, a Bench of Chief Justice Mr RC Lahoti, Mr Justice GP Mathur and Mr Justice PK Balasubramanian said the law on illegal migrants enacted by the Centre for Assam "negated the mandate" of Article 355 of the Constitution making it responsible for protecting every state against external aggression and internal disturbance. The court took serious note of the report of the then Assam

Governor Lt-Gen. SK Sinha to the Centre in 1998 about migration changing the demography in several districts of the state and encouraging insurgency in the entire region. "This being the situation, there can be no manner of doubt that the state of Assam is facing external aggression and internal disturbance on account of large-scale illegal migration of Bangladesh nationals," Mr Justice Mathur, writing the unanimous judgment, said. The influx of Bangladeshi nationals, who have illegally migrated into Assam, posed a threat to the integrity and security of the North-east, the court observed.

Termining the IMDT Act as the "main barrier" in identification and deportation of illegal migrants, the court said the Act came "to the advantage of such illegal migrants, as any proceeding initiated against them under the said provision almost entirely ends in their favour, enables them to have a document having official sanctity to the effect that they are not illegal migrants."

The court said: "The presence of such a large number of illegal migrants from Bangladesh, which runs into millions, is in fact an 'aggression' on the state of Assam and has also contributed significantly in causing serious 'internal disturbances' in the shape of insurgency of alarming proportions, making the life of the people of Assam wholly insecure and the panic generated thereby has created a fear psychosis." This has resulted in hampering the growth of Assam though it has vast natural resources, as people from the rest of the country have a general perception that it is a disturbed area, thereby curtailing the state's investment and employment potential. "The impact is such that it not only affects the state of Assam but it

also affects its sister states like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Nagaland, as the route to the said places passes through Assam," Mr Justice Mathur said.

The court was of the opinion that by enacting the IMDT Act, Parliament had divested the Centre of the power to remove migrants from Bangladesh, whose presence was creating a serious law and order problem, a fact which had been realised by the Centre as early as 1950. "It is the foremost duty of the Central government to protect its borders

and prevent trespass of foreign nationals," Mr Justice Mathur said, but pointed out that the presence of the illegal migrants has changed the demographic character of that region and the local people of Assam have been reduced to a status of a minority in certain districts.

"If an Act made by the legislature has the disastrous effect of giving shelter and protection to foreign nationals who have illegally transgressed the border any citizen is allowed to bring it to the notice of the Court," he said.

NEW DELHI, July 14. — A Group of Ministers will study the Supreme Court ruling on the IMDT Act and advise the government on what needs to be done, the home minister, Mr Shivraj Patil, said after a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, here today. "The GoM will hear the views of various parties and advise the government for further action," Mr Patil said. The Supreme Court had on struck down as unconstitutional the controversial Illegal Migrants Act on 12 July. — SNS

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Aasu warning over '3D' stir

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, July 14. — Detect. Delete. Deport illegal migrants. As the BJP announced its plan to intensify its "3D" programme to delete, detect and deport illegal Bangladeshis from Assam and West Bengal, the All Assam Students' Union today warned the party against "indulging in communal politics in the state in the wake of the repeal of the IMDT Act".

Aasu adviser Mr Samujjal Bhattacharyya said: "The BJP which didn't do anything to get the IMDT Act scrapped or implement clauses of the Assam Accord while it was in power at the Centre for six years, has no right to go ga over the repeal of the IMDT Act, thanks to the Supreme Court. We will not allow the BJP to pursue its policy of treating Hindu migrants from Bangladesh as refugees and Muslims migrants as illegal foreigners fit for deportation."

"Hindus or Muslims who had sneaked into the state from Bangladesh after 25

March, 1971, must leave. Aasu will launch a mass campaign to ensure that those who came to the state from the neighbouring country before the date are not subjected to harassment in the post-IMDT Act period during the process of detection and deportation," the Aasu leader said.

The Aasu leadership maintained that the Supreme Court verdict against the IMDT Act was a major respite for genuine Indian religious minorities living in Assam who have all along been treated as a vote bank by the Congress and a section of minority political parties. "Genuine Indian minority citizens should now come out of the trap of political parties which are only interested in votes of minorities, not in their welfare," the Aasu leaders said.

Aasu has called an emergency central executive committee meeting on 16 July to hammer out its future strategy in the state to fail the design of some political parties and radical minority organisations to whip up communal passion in Assam.



ASSAMESE FIRST? Aasu advisor Mr Samujjal Bhattacharjee and president Mr Shankar Rai address the media at their office in Guwahati on Thursday. — Eastern Projections

Why we need to walk the talk

There is a pattern in the evolving debate on whether the government should negotiate with the United Liberation Front of Assam. The Assamese writer, Indira Goswami, has worked for nearly a year to facilitate negotiations. The chief minister, Tarun Gogoi, favours engagement. Much of the Assamese media and many writers and cultural figures are behind Goswami's initiative and Assamese popular sentiments appear to strongly favour engagement.

A prominent opponent of engagement is Assam's governor, Ajai Singh — the architect of two counter-insurgency operations against it. He believes that he could have "finished" the Ulfa a long time ago, and is unwilling to countenance talking to a group that is militarily weaker today than it was when he commanded troops against it. Whatever one thinks of his position, it is odd in a parliamentary democracy to have an unelected governor — a retired military general — locking horns with an elected chief minister on whether negotiations is a better option than force.

There is a significant new cleavage in today's Assam: between the "security haves" and the "security have-nots". Those who live in a security bubble — surrounded everywhere by jeep-loads of armed men — are not exactly in a position to argue against engagement when their less-privileged compatriots want to give engagement a chance. There is widespread expectation in Assam that engagement could end the insecurity of everyday life — seen as being the pro-

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duct both of actions by insurgents and of counter-insurgency operations. While the pro-engagement position is strong in Assam, the anti-engagement position appears to be gaining strength in New Delhi and among its representatives in Assam.

Of course, a good argument can be made against engagement. Why, for instance, give credibility to the Ulfa's demand for sovereignty? And isn't there a danger that engagement will give further legitimacy to violence as a political instrument?

But in order to bolster its position, the anti-engagement camp has also come up with the choicest of epithets against the Ulfa — terrorists, criminals, extortionists, ISI agents and so on. But such tirades, that put the pro-engagement camp on the defensive, are misplaced.

The argument for engaging with the Ulfa is one that Jimmy Carter, a former US president, once made in another context. "Who would one engage with to stop a conflict or human rights abuse," he asked, "if not the people involved in the conflict or perpetrating the human rights violation?"

It is not the character of the Ulfa or the legitimacy of its demands that is at issue. The question is: what is the best way to end the stalemate between the Ulfa and the government? Is it engagement or non-engagement? If the government does not engage with the Ulfa, will the latter simply wither away? Do those who argue against engagement have up their sleeves another viable strategy to end the stalemate?

Those who are against engagement ignore the logic that sustains low-intensity armed conflicts in north-east India and relies on a selective account of conditions on the ground. The civilian pop-

Not engaging with the Ulfa now will only strengthen the hands of those who do not want to risk breaking with the past, argues Sanjib Baruah

willing to come to the negotiation table, it should not be read as a sign of sudden conversion to the path of non-violence and of an emerging new consensus that its old ways were wrong.

The internal dynamics of armed groups do not generally favour rushing to moderate positions when faced with a choice between sticking to old ways and change. Even if some people in the Ulfa may be convinced that the old strategy is not working or that the costs imposed by counter-insurgency are very high, the organization may not find it easy to switch gears.

There are risks involved in moving from the jungle to the negotiating table. Continuing with old positions is a more comfortable position because there is less danger of factional infighting. A swift compromise on foundational issues without trying to get everyone on board can produce rebellions, factionalism and splits.

Apart from the cadre, the Ulfa leadership also faces the question of explaining a radical shift to its sympathizers, especially to those who have lost loved ones. How will it explain a complete turn-around of goals and strategy to them? Ironically, it is precisely when an armed militant group is weak and considers moderation and that the unity of the organization and the authority of prevailing hierarchies become most threatened.

The Ulfa's response, reiterating its maximalist position and the demand for the release of ten of its central committee members from prisons in Assam and Bangladesh, therefore, should not come as a surprise. To read it as a sign that the Ulfa lacks the will to negotiate and is trying to regroup may be shortsighted.

The organization's *de facto* leadership probably considers it particularly important now to show to the world that

it is not compromising on its basic goals. It does not want to make some of the most important decisions that it has ever made with the majority of the organization's formal leadership behind bars. That won't exactly be the best recipe for getting all the factions of the organization behind the negotiations. Short of releasing jailed leaders, there is room for compromise — such as allowing meetings in prison.

The process of engaging with the Ulfa will be complex. At this stage, in responding to its statements, the government will be well-advised to take into account the compulsions of the Ulfa's internal dynamics. Its so-called core demand, that is sovereignty, cannot be seen as the immediate item on the agenda when government negotiators and the Ulfa leadership meet. A more realistic goal in approaching the question of engagement with the Ulfa would be to enable it as an organization to make this shift —

in other words, to strengthen the hands of those in the Ulfa camp who might favour moderation. Not engaging with the Ulfa now will only strengthen the hands of those who may not want to risk breaking with the past.

Responding creatively to the Ulfa's moves might require diplomatic skills that appear to be in short supply in the home ministry, where most important decisions on the North-east are made.

Even in our imperfect democracy, it is possible to make decisions that respect the wishes of the people most affected by this conflict — those bearing the brunt of the insecurity of everyday life that has characterized Assam for the past quarter century. We must do all that it takes to put a sustainable peace process in place.

Responding creatively to the Ulfa's moves might require skills that appear to be in short supply in the home ministry



Helping hand

Bush's men have been forced to secretly talk to Iraqi insurgents after discovering that America's unparalleled military might is quite useless as a tool to combat human misery she sees, Gogoi's is a response to the political consequences of that misery. After all, even George W.

No one should expect that engaging with the Ulfa would be easy. If the Ulfa is

9 JUL 2

THE TELEGRAPH

OUT OF THE WAY

^{9-18 1917}
How a law works depends largely on what the politicians make of it. If the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act did not work in Assam, it was because successive Congress governments used it as an excuse for their inaction. The governments' unwillingness to act had more to do with politics than with the actual difficulties in implementing the law. When it was enacted in 1983, it was meant to help the state government identify and deport illegal settlers in Assam, mostly from Bangladesh. Even the Congress, which defended the law, agreed that it had completely failed to serve its purpose. Now, the Supreme Court has struck it down as "unconstitutional" and declared that its purpose could be served better by the Foreigners' Act. This gives an edge to the argument by opponents of the IM(DT) Act, who complained that it had been used to actually prevent the identification of illegal migrants in Assam. The act, in their view, was aimed at the Muslim vote bank in the state. ^{9-18 1917}

Even if this argument has its own political bias, there is no denying that the issue has caused deep divisions within Assamese society since the enactment of the law. It has made the majority community live in constant fear of being swamped by illegal settlers. And this fear sparked off not only the violent Assam agitation of the early Eighties but also the Nellie massacre of 1983. For far too long, the controversial law has dominated Assam's politics, almost to the exclusion of the issues of governance. The chief minister, Mr Tarun Gogoi, would do well not to start a fresh controversy by enacting another law on the issue. The law's critics — the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Asom Gana Parishad and the All Assam Students' Union — also bear a major responsibility in the new situation. They must not use the repeal of the law to launch an anti-minority campaign. If a majority community's xenophobia can trigger communal tensions, so can a minority group's fear of persecution. The parties need to be cautious, especially in view of the state assembly elections early next year.

But the most important lesson of the Supreme Court verdict is for the whole country. Assam may have been particularly affected by illegal migration because of historical reasons. But the problem exists in many other parts of the country. As in Assam, politicians elsewhere have been guilty of conniving at it in the interest of their electoral politics. West Bengal's leftist rulers have long been accused of helping illegal settlers from Bangladesh become voters. The politics over the influx of Bangladeshis has gradually overshadowed the larger issue of the threat to demography and national security. It is time political parties and governments treated the question of illegal settlers as a major national concern.

14 JUL 2005

THE TELEGRAPH

Migrant act veto protest

ASTAFF REPORTER

Guwahati, July 13: Rumb-
lings of protest from minori-
ties insecure after the Supre-
me Court struck down the Ille-
gal Migrants (Determination
by Tribunals) Act tempered
celebrations in Assam today.

Two organisations repres-
enting the minorities, the San-
khalagu Yuva Parishad and
the Fakrul Islam faction of the
All Assam Minority Students
Union (AAMSU), organised a
rally in Morigaon to mobilise
opinion for a rollback of yes-
terday's court order.

The organisations jointly
called an eight-hour statewide
bandh tomorrow, beginning at
6 am. The Haroon-al-Rashid
faction of the AAMSU sepa-
rately announced a 12-hour
bandh on Friday.

The Akhil Bharatiya Vid-
yarthi Parishad and the Pur-
banchaliya Lok Parishad add-
ed to the tension by declaring
their opposition to the bandh.

Emerging from an emer-
gency meeting of his council
of ministers, Tarun Gogoi said
he was aware of the conflict
of interests and had asked de-
puty commissioners and supe-
rintendents of police to pull
out all stops to "maintain pea-
ce and harmony".

"It is the duty of my gov-
ernment to ensure that no In-
dian citizen is harassed," he
said, in a reference to the mi-
norities' fear that they will be
discriminated against in the
absence of the law.

Under the IM(DT) Act, in
force in Assam, the onus of pro-
ving that a person was an ille-
gal immigrant lay with the

complainant. This is not the
case with the Foreigners' Act,
applicable in the rest of India.

The chief minister said the
IM(DT) Act had been enacted
"under special circumstan-
ces" — at the height of the
anti-foreigner movement in
1983 — to protect minorities
from harassment on the pre-
text of driving out illegal im-
migrants from Bangladesh.

Trying hard not to sound
critical of the court's judg-
ment, Gogoi said his government
was legally obliged to abide by
it. "I am sure the apex court
considered the need to protect
genuine Indian citizens from
harassment while striking
down the act. The court actual-
ly might have suggested some
alternative measures."

The state Congress met
twice during the day Gogoi left
for New Delhi later.

Cong in a fix

The Congress governments in
both Delhi and Dispur find
themselves in a Catch-22 situa-
tion in the wake of the apex
court's verdict.

The two options in front of
them — to seek a review of the
apex court's ruling or push
through a new legislation in
Parliament to replace the "dis-
criminatory" law — are both
fraught with difficulties.

Legal experts said the gov-
ernment could file a petition
for a review, but the verdict
was unlikely to be overturned.

The second option is to push
for a new legislation with
some of the provisions of the
IM(DT) Act, but the party does
not have the numbers in Par-
liament to see it through.

SC ruling: AGP, Cong mum

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Guwahati: Firecrackers went off in the Asom Gana Parishad headquarters here on Tuesday morning as soon as the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the controversial Illegal Migrants (Detection through Tribunal) Act. The ruling Congress just didn't know what to say.

The AGP lost no time in naming its Lok Sabha MP Sarbananda Sonowal, who had single-handedly fought the legal battle with his petition in the Supreme Court seeking scrapping of the Act for last seven years, as "national hero."

On the flip side, chief minister Tarun Gogoi sounded defeated in his own backyard. PCC president Bhubaneswar Kalita was no less dejected by the outcome. "I had ordered for increase of number of tribunals and number of judges to expeditiously dispose all IM(DT) cases," Gogoi told TOI.

By evening, when the AGP office was decked up with glowing lights, government spokesman Ripun Bora dispatched the government's shaky reaction. "The Assam government till now does not know on what legal ground the honourable Supreme Court has passed the order to repeal the Act and is awaiting a copy of the judgment," the government statement said.

AGP general secretary Dilip



BJP workers took out a procession to celebrate striking down of the IM(DT) Act by SC, in Guwahati, on Tuesday.

Saikia said no members of the religious minority community, who are Indian citizens, need to fear because the Act is gone. "We guarantee protection to all Indian citizens," he said.

The BJP was also quick to put its weight behind the apex court judgment. This time it was the party national general secretary, Pramod Mahajan, who penned the reaction. Mahajan said, "It

was only the BJP out of all national parties that stood in favour of the repeal and striking down of the Act. The decision of the Supreme Court has confirmed what the BJP was already stating about the IM (DT) Act."

Sonowal's former colleague in AASU, Samjual Bhattacharyya, now the student body's advisor, said the sacrifices made by students have paid off.

Twenty years of IMDT leave behind 2.5 lakh unsettled cases

Press Trust of India

GUWAHATI, July 12. — The controversial Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunal (IMDT) Act, scrapped by the Supreme Court today, was applicable only in the state of Assam for the detection and deportation of illegal infiltrators from Bangladesh.

The Act came into existence in 1983 at the height of the anti-foreigners agitation launched by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) for purpose of detection of foreigners and deletion of their names from electoral rolls. The Assam Accord — signed on 14 August, 1985 by AASU, the Centre and the state government — had the provision that all foreigners who came to Assam after 25 March,

1971 would be detected, deleted and deported through the mechanism of the IMDT Act, 1983.

A feature of the Act, which many found objectionable and led to the demand for its scrapping, was that the onus of proving the citizenship of a person lay on the complainant and not on the accused infiltrator compared to the Foreigners' Act in which the onus is on the accused had to prove that he is not a foreigner, a Gauhati High Court lawyer said.

As of now there are 2.5 lakh cases pending with the 16 IMDT tribunals, which stand scrapped following the Supreme Court ruling. These will now be decided under the Foreigners' Act. In the two decades of its existence, only 1,494 illegal migrants were deported.

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THE STATESMAN

BLOW TO CONG BEFORE ASSEMBLY POLL

SC quashes IMDT Act

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, July 12. — In a major blow to the Congress government in Assam ahead of Assembly elections next year, the Supreme Court today struck down as unconstitutional the controversial Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, which the Opposition sees as a tool to delay identification and deportation of illegal Bangladeshi migrants.

Allowing a writ petition filed by the Asom Gana Parishad MP, Mr Sarbananda Sonowal, a three-judge Bench of Chief Justice Mr RC Lahoti, Mr Justice GP Mathur, Mr Justice PK Balasubramnyan, in a unanimous decision, declared the 1983 Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act and Rules framed in 1984 as "ultra vires" of the Constitution.

While Mr Sonowal had contended that the IMDT Act was only encouraging vote-bank politics without addressing the mammoth problem of illegal migrants, the Assam government had supported the law saying it was equitable.

The court directed all Tribunals constituted under the IMDT Act adjudicating the cases for identification of illegal migrants from Bangladesh to "cease to function" with immediate effect as the parent Act had been declared unconstitutional. The cases pending before the Tribunals under IMDT Act would stand transferred to Tribunals under the Foreigners Act, the court said.

Under the IMDT Act, a Central Act implemented only in Assam but opposed by the previous AGP government headed by Mr Prafulla Mahanta as well as the NDA government, the onus of proving the citizenship of an illegal migrant was on the complainant. Taking note of the



Bangladeshi labourers in Guwahati.
— A file photograph

'BLACK LAW' BASICS

- Discriminatory as only Assam has this law while other states governed by Foreigners' Act of 1946
- Onus of proving nationality lies with complainant, including police, not migrant
- Police can't issue quit-India notices, arrest, interrogate to determine status of migrants
- Encourages illegal migrants from other states to flock to Assam to evade deportation
- Only 1,494 persons declared illegal migrants were deported in 20 years

serious problems faced by the North-eastern state from rampant illegal migration, the court directed Assam to constitute sufficient number of Tribunals under the Foreigner's Act to deal with the situation.

Mr Sonowal said: "It is a victory for the people of Assam and secular society of the country... we are grateful to the Supreme Court." The AGP leader said: "Now there will be no problem for the government to detect and deport illegal migrants."

More reports on page 4

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THE STATESMAN

Govt ready to talk: Ibobi

AGENCIES
Imphal, July 12

MANIPUR CHIEF minister O. Ibobi Singh said on Tuesday the government has written to the leaders of All Naga Students Association Manipur (ANSAM), which has launched an indefinite economic blockade since June 22, to come for talks.

The government had so far not received any response from ANSAM, he said replying to a calling attention motion in the state Assembly.

State higher education minister Francis Ngajokpa had been deputed to contact ANSAM leaders and bring them to the negotiation table, he said and sought the cooperation of the House members in the government's efforts to end the economic blockade.

Moving the motion on deteriorating law and order situation in the state, B.D. Behring (BJP) and L. Ibomcha Singh (Federal Party of Manipur) said the government should hold talks with ANSAM leaders to end the current economic blockade.

ANSAM had launched the economic blockade in protest against the Manipur government decision to declare June 18 a holiday every year as 'Manipur Integrity Day'.

The decision, ANSAM said, was against the Naga plan for unification of all Nagas.

Behring, a Naga legislator, said instead of the economic blockade which affected everyone agitation leaders should adopt

other alternative and peaceful stir.

He said a peaceful agitation such the one adopted by Irom Sharmila (Sharmila has been fast unto death since 2001 to press for withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act from Manipur) could be launched.

Ibomcha Singh said the government should initiate talks with ANSAM leaders to end the economic blockade on national highways in the state as people were suffering a lot due to it.

He said the government should also send ministers and local legislators to the hill districts of Ukhrul, Senapati, Chandel and Tamenglong to hold talks with agitation leaders and their supporters. Participating in the discussion, Henry Paotei (Federal Party of Manipur) said all out efforts should be made to end the blockade.

Paotei, a Naga MLA, said prices of essential items had soared due to the economic blockade and rice was being sold at Rs 40 per kg in Tamenglong district.

The chief minister today said that his government had sought the Centre's help to end the continuing economic blockade of NH 39, the lifeline of the land-locked state.

The Centre had been informed of the situation arising out of the blockade, which was launched by All Naga Students Association, Manipur from June 22 to protest against the state government's decision to declare June 18 a holiday every year as 'Manipur Integrity Day', he told reporters on Monday.

13 JUL 2007 THE IMPHAL NEWS

অগ্নিগর্ভ মণিপুর, ইবোবি চরম সঙ্কটে

১০ জুলাই: স্থিতাবস্থা ফেরা দূরে থাক, মণিপুরে পরিস্থিতি আরও জটিল ও অগ্নিগর্ভ হয়ে উঠেছে। মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ওকরাম ইবোবি সিংহের অবস্থা এখন শাঁখের করাতে মতো। অবরোধ ভেঙে পণ্যবাহী ট্রাক চুকিয়ে তিনি বেদম চটিয়েছেন নাগা ছাত্রদের। তারা ইবোবিকে 'উচিত শিক্ষা' দিতে নেমেছে আসরে। কুড়িটির বেশি সরকারি দফতর পুড়িয়ে দিয়েছে বিক্ষুব্ধ নাগারা।

ছাত্র সংগঠন 'আনসাম'-এর অবরোধ আন্দোলন চলছিলই। তার উপর আজ মধ্যরাত থেকে 'সদর হিলস ডিস্ট্রিক্ট ডিমান্ড কমিটি' ৩৯ নম্বর জাতীয় সড়কে তিন দিনের অবরোধ ডেকেছে। শান্তি আলোচনার প্রস্তাব প্রত্যাখ্যান করেছে ক্ষুব্ধ 'আনসাম'। পাশাপাশি মৈতৈদের যৌথ মঞ্চ চরমপত্র দিয়ে বলেছে, ১৪ জুলাইয়ের মধ্যে অবরোধ প্রত্যাহারের ব্যবস্থা না হলে 'রক্তগঙ্গা' বইবে। নাগা ও মৈতৈ—দু' তরফই নিজেদের দাবিতে অনড় থাকায় কার্যত এক গৃহযুদ্ধের মুখে উত্তর-পূর্বের এই ছোট্ট রাজ্য।

সেনাপতি, তামেংলং, উথরুল ও চ্যান্ডেল এই চার জেলায় বিক্ষুব্ধ হয়ে ওঠা নাগাদের শাস্ত করতে কাল রাতে তড়িঘড়ি সাংবাদিক সম্মেলন ডেকে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ইবোবি জানান, সেনাপতি জেলার সদর শহরে আই আর বি-র যে দুই জওয়ান গুলি চালিয়েছিলেন তাদের গ্রেফতারের পর সাসপেন্ড করা হয়েছে। কিন্তু এতেও রাগ পড়েনি 'আনসাম'-এর।

আজ এই সংগঠন এক বিবৃতিতে জানিয়েছে, "মণিপুর সরকার নিরীহ বিক্ষোভকারীদের উপরেও অত্যাচার চালাচ্ছে। এই সরকারের সঙ্গে আপাতত আলোচনার প্রসঙ্গ নেই। গুলি চালনার জন্য সরকারকে ক্ষমা চাইতে হবে। জাতীয় সড়কে নিরাপত্তা বাহিনী ব্যবহার করে নাগাদের অবরোধ ভাঙা চলবে না। ১৮ জুনকে সরকারি ছুটির দিন করার সিদ্ধান্ত প্রত্যাহার করতে হবে।"

অন্য দিকে মৈতৈদের যৌথ মঞ্চ 'ইউনাইটেড কমিটি অফ মণিপুর' (ইউ সি এম) কেন্দ্র ও রাজ্য সরকারকে

হুমকি দিয়ে বলেছে, ১৫ জুলাইয়ের মধ্যে অবরোধ তোলার ব্যবস্থা করা না হলে যে কোনও অবাঞ্ছিত ঘটনার দায় সরকারের ঘাড়েই পড়বে। ইউ সি এম-এর ডাকা এক সভায় মণিপুর রাজবংশের অন্যতম উত্তরাধিকারিণী, পদ্মশ্রীপ্রাপ্ত লেখিকা মহারাজকুমারী বিনোদিনী দেবী, মণিপুর বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের ছাত্র কল্যাণ বিভাগের ডিন নবকুমার, সংস্থার সাধারণ সম্পাদক গৌরশ্যাম জানান, ১৮ জুনের স্মরণীয় দিনের অবমাননা মণিপুরীরা কিছুতেই মেনে নেবেন না। বৃহত্তর নাগাল্যান্ড দাবির বিরোধিতায় ওই দিনে প্রায় দশ জন মণিপুরী।

এই টানা পোড়েনে জেরবার মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ইবোবি। আজ বিকালে তিনি বলেন, "১৮ জুন নিয়ে নাগা ছাত্রদের দাবি মেনে নেওয়া অসম্ভব। এই সিদ্ধান্ত তিন বছর আগে বিধানসভায় পাশ হয়।" তবে নাগা ছাত্রদের ঠান্ডা করবেন কী উপায়ে এ মুহূর্তে ভেবে পাচ্ছেন না ইবোবি। তিনি বলেন, "বিষয়টা খুবই জটিল হয়ে উঠেছে। এর পিছনে আছে আছে নাগাল্যান্ড সরকার ও এন এস সি এন-এর প্রত্যক্ষ উস্কানি।" ইবোবির কথাতেই পরিষ্কার, এই বিষয় সঙ্কট নিয়ে এই মুহূর্তে দিশাহীন মণিপুর সরকার। ইবোবি আপাতত বসে জ্বালামুখীর শিখরে।

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

11 JUL 2005

PROTEST ■ Two IRB men suspended for attack

Naga blockade on, Manipur cut off

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
IMPHAL, JULY 10

MANIPUR remained cut off and hundreds of commuters were stranded as Naga student organisations blocked traffic on NH-39 for the second day today.

The blockade has been called by the All Naga Students Association to protest a recent government decision declaring June 18 a holiday to observe Manipur Integrity Day. It says the decision is against the Naga aim for the unification of all Naga-settled areas including those that are part of Manipur.

Meanwhile, two India Reserve Battalion (IRB) personnel were suspended today for their role in the alleged at-

3 securitymen killed

IMPHAL: Three Assam Rifles personnel were killed and two seriously injured when the insurgents, who were hiding by a roadside hill, sprayed bullets at the personnel of the 34th Battalion who were patrolling Waithou area, about 18 km south-east of Imphal, around 10.15 am. —PTI

tack on the agitators, which had led to violence in Senapati district yesterday.

Although the current blockade of NH-39 would end this evening, a three-day blockade by Sadar Hill District Demand Committee on the highway would begin from midnight.

Peeved at the frequent blockades, an umbrella organisation of Manipuri students, the United Committee

Manipur, today blamed the Centre for not developing the Imphal-Silchar highway (NH-53) which it said could have been used as an alternative to the blocked NH-39. It also criticised the Centre for not deploying enough forces to keep the highway open.

At a meeting here, the UCM appealed to the All Naga Students Association in Manipur (ANSAM) to settle the issue with the government through talks and to end the blockade. The UCM also served an ultimatum to the Centre and the state government to put an end to the blockade by July 15.

The Democratic Students Alliance of Manipur (DSAM) has also appealed to the government and the ANSAM to settle the issues through talks and help end the blockade.

11 JUL 2000

INDIAN EXPRESS

NSCN smoke after Manipur fir

Vows to take action against use of force by state government

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, July 10

SATURDAY'S ARSON across Manipur's hill districts has the NSCN (Isak-Muivah) smouldering even as the Okram Ibobi Singh government launched a damage-control exercise to soothe the frayed Naga tempers.

The NSCN on Sunday said it would not remain silent to the "use of force and bullets" by the Manipur government against the Naga peoples' movement for their "legitimate aspiration of living in an integrated homeland".

"The movement (for integration of the Naga-inhabited areas of the North-East) has reached a point of no-return", said NSCN(I-M) spokesman Kraibo Chawang from Dimapur. "Anything can happen now... the Manipur government shouldn't have responded to the non-violent and democratic movement of the Nagas with bullets".

Chawang cited the firing by the Indian Reserve Battalion personnel on two Naga demonstrators at Senapati on Friday night. The incident provoked anger in the Naga-dominated areas, and, as a consequence, at least 20 government buildings in four districts were reduced to cinders by Saturday night.

The NSCN outburst coincided with the imposition of a 48-hour bandh by the All-Naga Students' Association of Manipur (ANSAM) from Sunday morning. The ANSAM has vowed to intensify its agitation if the government does not revoke its decision to

declare June 18 as "State Integrity Day" every year.

The June 18 holiday in honour of the martyrs of the 2001 uprising against the NSCN cease-fire extension angered the Nagas, who saw it as a mockery of their demand for integration of the Naga-inhabited hills with Nagaland. Chief minister Ibobi Singh scotched allegations of strong-arm tactics by his government, but, at the same time, warned militant outfits from taking advantage of the situation across the disturbed hills.

Singh felt his government has sent a positive message to the hill-dwellers by taking prompt action against the two IRB men responsible for opening fire on Naga locals at Senapati. "The two men have been suspended", he said. The Naga organizations, however, want the guilty IRB men to be handed over to them for trial according to customary laws.

Hundreds of passengers were stranded at many places in Manipur on Sunday during the second day of the blockade. The situation arising out of the blockade on the Imphal-Guwahati National Highway No. 39 in Senapati district was reported tense as the state remained cut off from the rest of the country.

Reports from Senapati said that, although the Naga-sponsored blockade of NH 39 would end on Sunday evening, another blockade by the Sadar Hill District Demand Committee on the same highway would begin at midnight on Sunday night for three days.



READY FOR ACTION: Naga rebel outfits like NSCN(I-M) have promised action to avenge the use of force against innocent civilians.

Rebels kill 3 AR personnel

Manipur insurgents on Sunday exploded a powerful bomb and ambushed an Assam Rifles patrol, killing three security personnel and seriously injuring two others in Thoubal district, official sources said.

The insurgents first exploded a powerful bomb when Assam Rifles personnel of the 34th Battalion were passing through the Waithou area on NH 39, 18 km from here.

After exploding the bomb, the insurgents - who were hiding beside a roadside hillock - sprayed bullets on the security personnel, killing three Assam Rifles men on the spot and injuring two others. It was not known if any insurgent was injured, the sources said. Additional forces began combing the area for the insurgents who had escaped after the attack.

The identity of the insurgents was not immediately known. Agencies Imphal



Insurgents at a rebel training camp in Manipur.

14 JUL 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

ক্ষিপ্ত নাগা ছাত্রদের তাণ্ডব মণিপুরের চারটি জেলায়

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, আগরতলা, ৯
জুলাই: মণিপুরে সরকার নাগা ছাত্রদের
জাতীয় সড়ক অবরোধ ব্যর্থ করে
দেওয়ায় আজ ভোর থেকে মণিপুরের
৪ পাহাড়ি জেলায় তাণ্ডব শুরু হয়েছে।
চার জেলায় জেলাশাসক, পুলিশ
সুপার-সহ অধিকাংশ সরকারি দফতরে
আগুন লাগিয়ে দেয় বিক্ষোভকারীরা।
পাল্টা ১৪৪ ধারা জারি করে সরকার।
পুলিশ, আধা-সামরিক বাহিনী ও
সেনাবাহিনীকেও শাস্তি বজায় রাখতে
নামানো হয়েছে।
নিরাপত্তা বাহিনীর কড়া পাহারায়
কাল রাতে অবরোধ ভেঙে তিনশোরও
বেশি ট্রাক জাতীয় সড়ক দিয়ে আনা
হয়। প্রতিবাদে সেনাপতি জেলার সদর
শহরে বাজারের কাছে বিশাল বিক্ষোভ
মিছিল বের করে আনসাম ও অন্য কিছু
নাগা সংগঠন। মিছিল হঠাৎই অশান্ত
হয়ে উঠে নিরাপত্তা রক্ষীদের আক্রমণ
করলে জওয়ানরা প্রথমে লাঠি ও পরে
চার রাউন্ড গুলি চালায়। দুই
বিক্ষোভকারী জখম হয়।
রাতেই চান্ডেল, তামেংলং ও
উখরুলে এই খবর চলে যায়।
সেনাপতি ও উখরুলে জেলাশাসক ও
এসপির দফতর পুড়িয়ে দেয়
বিক্ষোভকারীরা। তামেংলংয়ে তথা,
রেশম তন্তু ও বাণিজ্য দফতরে আগুন

লাগিয়ে দেওয়া হয়। চান্ডেলে মহকুমা
শাসকের দফতর, জেলা শিল্প দফতর
পুড়ে ছাই হয়ে যায়। আক্রমণের মুখে
প্রশাসন কার্যত নিষ্ক্রিয় হয়ে যায়।
পণ্যবোঝাই ট্রাক ইক্ষলে চোকাতে
পারায় সরকারের ধারণা হয়, সংকট
আপাতত মিটল। কিন্তু আনসাম ও
ইউএনসি-র প্রবল সমর্থক এনএসএফ
পাল্টা হুমকি দেয়। এন এস এফের
সভাপতি ফুশিকা আওমি বলেন,
“মণিপুরের মুখ্যমন্ত্রীকে আমরাই উচিত
শিক্ষা দেব। অসম থেকে ডিমাপুর হয়ে
মণিপুরে ট্রাক ঢোকে। এখানে ট্রাকগুলি
আটকে রাখবে আমাদের সদস্যেরা। এ
নিয়ে এন এস সি এনের (আই-এম)
সঙ্গেও কথা হয়ে গিয়েছে। এ বার দেখি
ইবোবি কী করে ডিমাপুরে পুলিশ
পাঠান।” এ নিয়ে অবশ্য আই-এম
সংগঠন মন্তব্য করতে রাজি হয়নি।
ইক্ষলে এ সংবাদ পেয়ে ইবোবি
নাগাল্যান্ডের মুখ্যমন্ত্রীকে টেলিফোন
করে তাঁর ক্ষেত্রের কথা জানান।
ইবোবি বলেন, “আমি আজ রিওকে
স্পষ্ট বলেছি যে নাগাল্যান্ডের ছাত্র ও
অন্যান্য সংগঠন তাদের সব অধিকারের
সীমা লঙ্ঘন করে অন্য রাজ্যে
আইনশৃঙ্খলায় বিঘ্ন ঘটচ্ছে। আমরা এ
সব বরদাস্ত করব না। কেন্দ্রীয়
স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রকেও এ কথা জানিয়েছি।”

10 JUL 2005

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

TALKING TO ULFA

We cannot apply the same yardstick for talks with the Ulfa that applied for the talks now in progress with NSCN(IM) because the issues are different

RECENT media reports indicate that talks with the Ulfa will finally materialise. While this is a significant development, disturbing are reports that talks may be unconditional and that one of Ulfa's preconditions is the release of their leaders under detention before talks.

While talks with the insurgents are imperative to identify and resolve grievances, those concerned with policy decisions must take note of the errors committed in relation to the ceasefire and talks in progress with the NSCN(IM), Ulfa's linkages to the ISI, Pakistan's proxy war strategy, Bangladeshi support to north-eastern insurgent groups and their proxy war strategy, the situation in Assam, and the fact that elections in Assam are round the corner.

We cannot and must not apply the same yardstick for talks with the ULFA that applied for the talks now in progress with the NSCN(IM). The issues are different. While the ISI and Bangladeshi intelligence have assisted the NSCN(IM) in the past and continue to do so, the NSCN(IM) leadership and its cadres are not directly controlled by the ISI. Indeed, they have proved time and again that they function with a mind of their own and operate in their own interests. On the other hand, the Ulfa as also many other groups are totally under the control of the ISI and DGFI.

Ulfa's leadership has been given sanctuary in Bangladesh and has invested in businesses in that country and abroad with the help of the Bangladesh government, DGFI and the ISI. Ulfa cannot touch this capital without the concurrence of all these agen-

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By JR MUKHERJEE

cies. Their personal security in Bangladesh is provided by these agencies. The families of these leaders and indeed the leaders themselves are puppets. They are in no position to take a single decision of importance. Any talks by the Indian government with the Ulfa, therefore, will be controlled by the ISI/DGFI and amount to talks on Pakistani and Bangladeshi terms!

In 1997 the NSCN(IM) was brought to its knees. This is what

ment of India from a position of strength.

The situation in Assam is similar to that in Nagaland in 1997. Ulfa is almost on its knees. It has been thrown out of Bhutan. It lacks popular support. The people of Assam are yearning for peace and development. The Ulfa is in disarray with only its eastern region (Upper Assam) cadres operating out of camps in Myanmar though under intense pressure from the security forces.



Should the talks take off and a ceasefire be contemplated, we must learn lessons from our mistakes in handling the NSCN(IM), DHD, Karbis and others

brought them to the negotiating table and the current ceasefire. We then mishandled the terms of the ceasefire and its management. We allowed the NSCN(IM) to recruit cadres, train, equip and arm them. They are now over 5,000 armed and trained cadres; we have allowed them to carry out rampant extortion and take control of the whole of Nagaland and the claimed areas in the neighbouring states. Today they dictate terms and literally govern these areas and are largely responsible for the situation in Manipur.

Nothing happens in these areas without their consent. They hold the security forces, responsible for policing the ceasefire, to ransom with a threat of breaking/abrogating the ceasefire. Today the NSCN(IM) talks to the govern-

Under such circumstances it would be foolhardy if policy makers release the interned Ulfa leadership and go into a ceasefire mode on the pattern we did with NSCN(IM).

Why should they be released or a ceasefire declared on the pattern we did for the (IM)? This is obviously on ISI and DGFI advice. Acceptance of this would appear to be most unsound from the point of view of national security with only short-term political gains in view of the coming elections.

Undoubtedly talks with Ulfa and a temporary peace in Assam would be to the credit of the present Assam government. However, there will undoubtedly be a split in the AGP which cannot but help the present government. The BJP in Assam is also unlikely to contribute much of opposi-

tion. There would probably be some Ulfa-sponsored candidates. But is it worth it when they have the capability to win the election on their own?

What is required are concerted efforts to resolve the immigration issue, development and improvement of the economic climate. These are issues agitating the people. It is also necessary to get the Myanmar government to clamp down on and destroy Ulfa camps in Myanmar. This should be possible given the improved relations with India. Such a step would be of tremendous help in marginalising the Ulfa.

International pressure must also be brought to bear on Bangladesh to deny the rebels sanctuary in that country. Only if these steps are taken will talks bear fruit. Should the talks take off and a ceasefire be contemplated, we must learn lessons from our mistakes in handling the NSCN(IM), Dima Haram Daoga, Karbis and others. The Ulfa must be brought into camps on Indian soil and made to give up their weapons.

They must not be permitted fresh recruitment, reorganisation, refitting, rearming, extortion or be allowed to take control of the state as was done in the 80s or in the case of the NSCN(IM). They must not under any circumstances be permitted to interfere with the elections. Ceasefire ground rules must be carefully worked out in consultation with the army and the police. In the long-term context we will at some stage in the near future have to negotiate with Pakistan and Bangladesh to find long-term solutions as the proxy war continues.

While the policy makers will undoubtedly take steps in initiating these talks as they deem appropriate, they must remember that they are answerable to the people.