

Playing to the gallery

9/12/05
23/12
Ulfa must stop intimidation

ULFA must stop blowing hot and cold if it wants to keep the peace process alive. The tone and phraseology of an article in the latest issue of the outfit's monthly electronic mouthpiece — Freedom — is enough to convince most that Ulfa is merely playing to the gallery. It blames "colonial Indian rulers" for "procrastination" in holding direct talks and warns that the "silence of the gun" should not be construed as its weakness. It thinks it has, by appointing the 11-member People's Consultative Group, fulfilled expectations. Far from it. There obviously has been a delay in getting down to brass tacks — the PCG, formed in early September, held its first meeting with National Security Adviser MK Narayanan at the end of October. Also, Ulfa must realise the PCG is holding talks with the PMO, bypassing the Union home ministry. Significantly, the first meeting was attended by the Prime Minister, a privilege not extended to NSCN(I-M) leaders, despite their religious observance of a ceasefire since August 1997. Surely, the PMO has far more serious matters to deal with than Ulfa and cannot be expected to be at the militant outfit's beck and call.

The trouble with Ulfa leaders is that they are "negotiating" from behind the scenes, obviously from their foreign mentors' headquarters. If they claim to be fighting for the people, they should mix with them. Naga leaders are doing exactly this, despite living outside India. Chief minister Tarun Gogoi has promised Ulfa leaders safe passage. If after all this, Ulfa continues to harp on the release of some of its leaders and army's withdrawal, the response should be "no deal". Given past experience, the government cannot take this risk. Direct talks without a formal ceasefire is unthinkable, so why the delay?

23 DEC 2005

THE STATESMAN

Gogoi offers safe passage

21/12 7.15.05 10.13
People's Consultative Group to demand release of ULFA leaders

Special Correspondent

GUWAHATI: Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi on Tuesday announced that his government would provide safe passage to leaders of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) whenever they came for direct talks with the Centre.

Mr. Gogoi made the offer in his keynote address at a two-day discussion on "Road to Peace and Progress in South Asia: Learning from the neighbourhood" organised jointly by the Centre for Development and Peace Studies, Guwahati and the British Deputy High Commission at Kolkata.

'Formalise ceasefire'

Earlier on Monday night, writer and chief facilitator between the Centre and the ULFA-formed People's Consultative Group (PCG), Indira Goswami a.k.a. Mamoni Raisom Goswami told *The Hindu* that the PCG would strive for formalisation of "cessation of hostilities" both by the ULFA and the security forces. She pointed out that the ULFA has not indulged in any violence since the peace process started.

"Now is the time to formalise the cessation of hostilities by both the sides to pave the way for direct talks," she added.

Dr. Goswami said the PCG in the next round of talks with the Centre would demand the release of the arrested ULFA leaders and urged the Centre to ease pressure on Bangladesh for extradition of ULFA general secretary Anup Chetia lodged in a Dhaka jail. The ULFA demanded release of its jailed leaders to enable the outfit to take a collective decision on holding direct talks with the Centre.

Modalities discussed

The PCG, which met on Monday here, discussed the modalities of direct talks between the Centre and the ULFA. "Both the Centre and the ULFA would be committing a historic blunder if they fail to avail [of] the opportunity of sitting across the table and discuss the core issues to pave the way for permanent peace," Dr. Goswami said.

The consultative group also decided to seek release of the jailed woman ULFA cadres along with 25 children currently lodged in different jails of the State.

21 DEC 2005

THE HINDU

49-10
1971 ✓

An unnecessary “army” in Assam

g-n s State ✓

Nothing like an election season to give fresh life to old causes. The approaching Assembly election in Assam has spurred the All Assam Students' Union to think up a new vehicle to “protect” the social and economic rights of the people who are deemed to belong to the State, as against “outsiders.” The vociferous organisation recently formed the Asom Sena with the twin objectives of campaigning for reservations in Central and State government jobs in Assam for Assamese and protecting Assamese culture from the “invasion” by “alien, vulgar” influences. The move by AASU is evidently aimed at setting the agenda for the political parties in the election fray well before the campaigning begins. As the spearhead of the 1980s anti-foreigner campaign, whose leaders went on to form the Asom Gana Parishad that ended the Congress monopoly over the State, AASU now feels it has been marginalised and its original causes betrayed. It jettisoned Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, who led the six-year-long student agitation and was a founder of the AGP, accusing him of having “failed” to get the 1985 Assam Accord implemented “in full.” In recent months, the students' union has expressed strong opposition to amendments in the Citizenship Act that apparently go against provisions in the Accord for the identification and deportation of illegal immigrants. It also wants implementation of a clause in the Accord promising “constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards” to preserve the “culture, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.” Worryingly, this seems aimed as much at excluding the large numbers of settlers from other States and Assam's own linguistic and religious minorities as it is against illegal immigrants.

While there is nothing wrong with the demand that Assamese must not be discriminated against in their own State, the vigilantism that AASU appears to be promoting through the Asom Sena can only be an unwelcome addition to the already volatile brew of communal animosities in the State. The leaders of the new group describe it as “an army without weapons” that will conduct a non-violent campaign to achieve its goals, but the name of the newly formed organisation is disquieting by itself, and evokes chilling parallels with the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. Identity politics is always a dangerous game, and its populist character makes it all too easy for its practitioners to descend to extreme methods against sections of the population that are seen as different or “alien.” In their enthusiasm to win votes in the forthcoming election, political parties in Assam will certainly want AASU on their side, but they should steer clear of a campaign that could promote hatred or violence. In particular, the AGP, whose new leadership following the exit of Mr. Mahanta is believed to have close links with AASU, would do well not to forget the historical and complex multi-ethnic and plural character of Assam.

17 DEC 2005

THE HINDU

**ASSAM ■ 'To stop exploitation
of state citizens by New Delhi'**

AASU forms army to protect 'local interest'

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP
GUWAHATI, DECEMBER 9

THE All Assam Students' Union (AASU) has launched a new organisation Asom Sena to fight "more vigorously" to safeguard the interests of the locals, especially in job reservations.

The Sena, formally launched at Barpeta in Lower Assam, comes a year after the influential student body announced this at its Dibrugarh convention. AASU advisor Samujjal Bhattacharyya, the chief advisor of the Sena, said the new entity would serve as a "more aggressive front" of the student body and work against the "exploitation of Assam by New Delhi."

"This is a purely apolitical organisation which believes in non-violence. It will champion regional issues in a more aggressive manner," Bhattacharyya said. He added the Sena would not compromise on basic issues facing people of Assam, most important being employment of candidates belonging to the indigenous communities.

The AASU had decided to launch the Sena in Decem-

ber 2003 when there were allegations that the railways had preferred candidates from Bihar over locals. This had sparked a series of protests and violent incidents in the state.

"One hundred per cent job reservation in all central government offices and departments in Assam for candidates from indigenous people should be made mandatory," the chief advisor said.

The Sena has also vowed to resist the "invasion" of "vulgar, alien influences on the state's culture". "Increasing influence of vulgarity in the name of western culture has already corrupted a section of the youth of our state.

The Sena will find ways to stop such erosion of values," said former AASU president Prabin Boro. Interestingly, though Boro was tipped to be the chairman or the chief convener of the Sena, he refused to take up the job. There are indications that he would contest the ensuing state assembly election as a candidate of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP).

AASU central executive member Niranjana Nath has been appointed the chief advisor.

Aasu to protest border infiltration

BTS
Bikash Singh
GUWAHATI 2 DECEMBER

THE All Assam Students Union (Aasu) will form a human chain along the Indo-Bangladesh international border to protest against the government's alleged inability to fence the porous Indo-Bangladesh border in the Assam sector.

The Aasu is also going to announce the formation of the Asom Sena, a cadre-based outfit on December 8. According to Aasu, nearly 14 fundamentalist organisations has set up camps in Assam and these organisations were providing arms training to the illegal immigrants. "The arrest of ISI and Al-Qaeda agents in Assam proves that the place has become a safe sanctuary for anti-national elements who take advantage of the porous border and sneak in the state," Aasu observed.

Aasu has alleged both the Centre and state government are not serious about the illegal immigrant problems faced by Assam. Union home minister, Shivraj Patil was slated to jointly inspect the Indo-Bangladesh border along with the Aasu delegates in September this year.

Aasu adviser, Samujjal Bhattacharya said as the home Minister was yet to find time for visiting the Indo-Bangladesh bor-

der it showed just how serious the government was about the influx problem.

"This was an arrangement made during the tripartite discussion between the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh and Aasu delegates in May this year. However the arrangements still remained on paper," he said.

Mr Bhattacharya added the electoral roll



GOGOI

indicated a remarkable change in the demographic profile of several districts of the state. "Aasu has even dashed off a letter to Assam chief minister, Tarun Gogoi, asking him to take up the matter with the Centre.

"We have set a December deadline for the chief minister to respond or Assam will burn. We cannot tolerate an illegal immigrant becoming the chief minister of Assam in coming years," he said.

General secretary, Aasu, Tapan Roy observed the state government was violating the Supreme Court directives. The court had asked the state government to increase the number of tribunals under the Foreigners Act.

"The court while scarping the IMDT Act recently had stated tribunal functioning under it, will be abolished. The court also asked the state government to increase the number of tribunals under the Foreigners Act. However the state has not taken any step in this regard," he said.

Fresh violence in Karbi Anglong

Bikash Singh
GUWAHATI 2 DECEMBER

SIX people including a woman and an infant were killed, apart from dozens of houses being torched, in a fresh outbreak of violence in the strife torn Karbi Anglong area of Assam. Assam home commissioner, BK Gohain told ET the Superintendent of Police (SP) of the area, Krishna Das, has been transferred and will be replaced by Anurag Tanka. "We are monitoring the situation," he said.

Already the government has transferred two SPs in the span of two months. Senior police officials said the incident took place when armed Dimas tribesmen attacked Shirrkongnep village, 300 kilometres east of Assam's main city, Guwahati.

"In the wee hours of Friday night, the attackers mowed down sleeping villagers. They were armed with sophisticated weapons and fired from the close range. All the dead were from the majority Karbi tribe," he said. He further claimed suspected militant outfit Dima Halam Daogah had carried out these killings. On Wednesday, the police recovered the bodies of two Nepali couples from the area.

Evil designs

9-11-2012
11-15-2012

The violence in Karbi Anglong shows that the government should be more sceptical about demands for ethnic homelands, says Sanjib Baruah

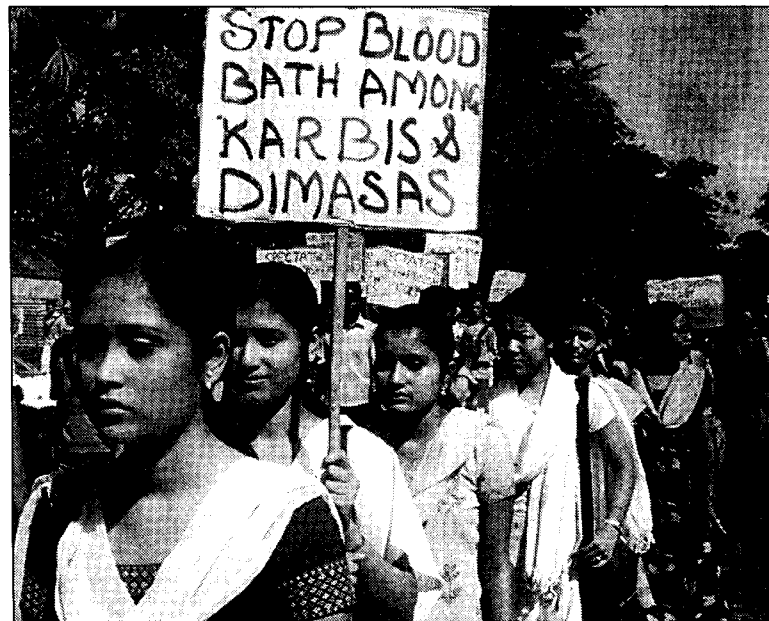
We may never be able to name and punish the individuals directly responsible for the recent killing spree in Assam's Karbi Anglong district. But one thing is quite clear: there is a connection between the political agendas of groups engaged in the early stages of negotiations with the government of India and what the violence has tried to achieve on the ground. The displacement of targeted ethnic groups from their hearth and home in certain areas fits well with what leaders of some ethnic militias seek to achieve at the negotiating table. Given this pattern, many apparently moderate leaders of ethnic movements in the North-east could be accused of complicity with ethnic cleansing. But our legal and political processes do not take the crime of ethnic cleansing as seriously as international law does.

To ensure that such violence is not repeated, it is important to understand the logic of *de facto* exclusive ethnic homelands that has come to capture the imagination of ethnic militants in the region. Our decision-makers have taken a far too benign view of this phenomenon and given little attention to the long-term costs of perpetuating the idea.

There is now a perception in the North-east that exclusionary ethnic agendas — no matter how unfair they are from the perspective of other ethnic groups living in the same area — have a chance of success if there is a demonstrated capacity for sustained political mobilization. And with appropriate positioning *vis-à-vis* rival ethnic militias, the local counter-insurgency establishment could even become an ally.

Officials who enter into negotiations with ethnic militias do not seem to realize that a demand for a homeland may enjoy the support of a particular ethnic group, but other ethnic groups living in the same area may feel threatened by it. The government's readiness to concede to such demands has gradually weakened political forces that stand for a more pluralistic form of politics.

This is not the first time in recent years that Karbi Anglong and the adjacent North Cachar Hills districts have seen such mayhem. There has been widespread violence between



Spare a thought

Karbhis and Kukis in Karbi Anglong, and between Dimasas and Hmars in the North Cachar Hills. The two were part of a single district until 1970, and the present conflicts in the districts are related. The Mikir Hills district was renamed Karbi Anglong in 1976. The Dimasas are a minority scheduled tribe in Karbi Anglong, but constitute a majority of the tribal population in North Cachar Hills district. The demand of the Karbi ethnic militia, the United Peoples Democratic Solidarity, for a homeland for the Karbis, and the demand of the Dima Haram Daogah for a "Dimaraji state" — and the efforts to rename the North Cachar Hills district "Dima Halili" — provide the backdrop to these episodes of ethnic violence.

But a homeland for one ethnic group often translates into second-class citizenship status for another, even though materially one may be no worse off than the latter. Homeland demands in the North-east therefore inevitably invite conflict. Ethnic militias seeking a homeland come in conflict with groups that are seen as obstacles to the demand. That was the source of the Dimasa-Hmar violence of 2003. The Dimaraji envisioned by Dimasa activists is not limited to

North Cachar Hills district. It extends to areas in neighbouring Karbi Anglong and Cachar districts, and it also includes Dimapur, the commercial centre of Nagaland.

DHD activists have reportedly encouraged and facilitated new Dimasa settlements in the Dhansiri and Kheroni Charali area in Karbi Anglong. There were signboards proclaiming Eastern Dimaraji in these areas. These moves led to significant tensions between Dimasa and Karbi militants prior to the recent outbreak of violence. The government of India's decision, following the ceasefire with the DHD, to set up one of the designated camps for DHD militants in this area, became a source of irritation for Karbi militants. Indeed, according to several reports, militants housed in that camp were responsible for some of the most gruesome killings of Karbis.

Like the DHD, the UPDS too has signed a ceasefire agreement with the Centre in 2002. As it often happens in such situations, it produced a dissident faction. Members of the anti-talks factions, now known as the Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front and the Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Resistance Force,

appear to be major players in the revenge attacks against Dimasas as well as in earlier outbreaks of violence against Kukis.

Certain peculiarities of property rights in the hills of north-east India give ethnic militias unusual capacity to change demographic realities on the ground. In places that are designated as forest areas and in lands that are set aside for shifting cultivation, there is considerable fluidity in settlement patterns. Many groups may have settled and begun to cultivate such lands relatively recently. Since these people do not have legal papers to prove property rights — and in any case, most of these lands have not been surveyed — ethnic militias seeking to displace them can do so with relative ease.

The only security that such a group can get is from an ethnic militia of its own. The government is not in a position to defend their property rights, especially since the settlement itself, say in what is technically a forest reserve, may be illegal.

Thus, whether a particular population is indigenous to an area or not often becomes a highly contested issue. At the root of the Karbi-Kuki violence of 2003 was the Karbi view that Kukis are an immigrant community occupying their land. While Kukis living in the Hamren subdivision of Karbi Anglong are indigenous, say Karbi militants, those living in the Singhason-Khonbamon Hill range of Diphu subdivision are recent migrants from Nagaland and Manipur.

Yet the latter group of Kukis cultivate a highly-valued commercial ginger crop that not only finds its way to other parts of India, but has invited recent export orders from as far away as Germany. But Kuki farmers today are too scared to go to their fields. Plans to set up ginger candy and ginger paste producing plants in the area have been shelved. The economic costs of the violence accompanying homeland politics can be quite high.

As the plight of these ginger growers highlight, responding to ethnic militancy and meeting the challenges of economic development of the North-east are not separate issues. By giving in uncritically to the demands for ethnic homelands we have encouraged more such demands, leading to more ethnic violence. By giving a short shrift to the democratic value of equality among citizens we have risked making the North-east permanently ungovernable.

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PM roadmap for peace

5-9 29/10

The Prime Minister, his right arm in a sling (he was recovering from a minor operation on the hand), greeted the 11-member group which had come from Assam to talk to him on the demands of the United Liberation Front of Asom, which claims that its main goal is sovereignty for the state. That the process had gotten this far was significant itself — the small group, which calls itself the People's Consultative Group, has been set up by Ulfa. It is representative of Ulfa, not of the people of Assam.

While we may debate on the level of support for the organisation in the rural areas of the state — and there is no doubt that it does indeed exist — there is little question of the groundswell of disappointment, unhappiness and confusion about what the group wants today: a far cry from its heady founding days in 1979 in Sibsagar, when it spoke in a mix of nationalism and Leftism about the need to break away from the shackles of India's economic and political colonial structures.

The world has changed since then; so has the North-east and India; so has Assam.

Many have died in Assam, not only in fake encounters organised by security forces but also in direct clashes between Government forces and Ulfa, as well as in disappearances caused by security forces which have taken away men and women from villages in the name of security and questioning; and many have fallen prey to Ulfa's bullets, its intimidation and extortionist ways.

Today, a number of Ulfa "people" — men, women and children languish in jails in Assam — not quite forgotten but those who were captured from Ulfa camps in Bhutanese territory in the December 2003 All Clear Operation launched by the Royal Bhutanese Army.

The tiny army smashed the organisation in the Himalayan kingdom where it had set up base for years, with the National Liberation Front of Bodoland and the Kamatapur Liberation Organization, and has forced it — whether it acknowledges the fact or not — to rethink its future and the strategy.

The Goswami factor

INDIRA Raisom Goswami, better known as Mamoni Baideau affectionately in Assam, had her first meeting with Ulfa in 1993. It later took her to a camp in Nalbari where she was impressed with the way it was trying to organise people into road building and other economic activities. She had been troubled by Ulfa's killing of a childhood friend — Manabendra Sarma, the trade unionist, and Girish Goswami, a bank officer who happened to be her cousin in a bank robbery, in those early days. But being a writer and person with rich experiences of India and the world, being of an open mind, she kept meeting

them to hear their viewpoints.

I do not know if she is still convinced by Ulfa's defence of those murders. But over the past years, she has been in touch with Ulfa and more specifically Paresh Baruah, the commander in chief of the army. And she is deeply concerned by what she saw as the human tragedy caused by the Indian

and road connectivity, farmers want chilling units for their meat, vegetable and fruit products so that these don't rot and processing plants next door so they can get value addition and roads and truck transport to send them to the nearest market; young people want better schools and teachers as well as interconnectivity through the Internet.

They want to compete, to move forward and out while retaining the values of the traditions. Ulfa and its acolytes must understand these ground realities. There is also a Lakshman rekha for the Government of India and Indians.

I am including people like myself who consider themselves Indians and are proud to be so, instead of getting into convoluted arguments about "layered sovereignty".

We oppose the many manipulations and schemes of government to divide people. But we support the idea of democracy, open governance, "One nation, many peoples".

Greater autonomy and freedom to the states and the people are a must and we must find ways of enabling this to happen.

Otherwise India cannot progress, we'll have islands of prosperity and seas of despair.

The idea and theories as are coming out of the PCG's conversations with the "public" are interesting and confusing (probably some thousand responses while the population of Assam is 27 million and a representative sample survey on such issues cannot be less than a few lakh).

They have a role in discussion and enabling the process of regional and national change.

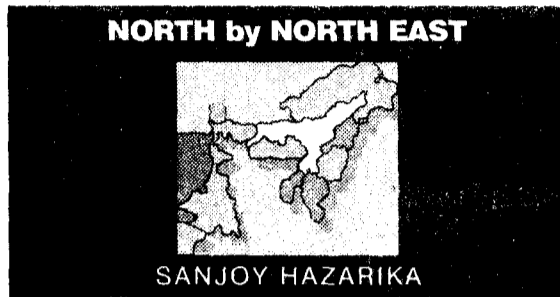
Need for ceasefire

THIS was put beautifully by the Prime Minister on the afternoon of 26 October to the PCG (it has already had a meeting with National Security Adviser MK Narayanan for meeting Dr Manmohan Singh for about 20 minutes). He delineated the challenge, the opportunity and the hope in two exquisite sentences that took the PCG by surprise. "I am willing to listen to whatever concerns that you have. I am a servant of the Constitution and you should recognise the complexity of our polity."

Without all the noise about core issues and sovereignty, Dr Singh, with firmness and grace, laid out the roadmap to the group.

This needs support because it demonstrates goodwill, dignity and flexibility. Ulfa should show these qualities in its response and a PCG spokesman indicated that the problem could be settled "through sustained political dialogue".

The next steps: a full and unconditional ceasefire by both sides and, through more talks between the government and the PCG, enable direct dialogue between Ulfa leaders and the Centre and Assam.



People's Consultative Group members before boarding the flight to Delhi for talks with the Centre on Wednesday. At Guwahati airport on Monday. — Eastern Projections

PM ready to talk it out with Ulfa negotiators



Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 26 OCTOBER

THE crucial talks to "prepare the ground for a Centre-Ulfa dialogue" took off on Wednesday with the prime minister offering to the Ulfa-appointed People's Consultative Group (PCG) "a discussion on all issues bothering Assam" but within the four corners of the Constitution.

In an assurance to the PCG, a group of 11 Assamese experts from different fields, that virtually rules out a discussion on Ulfa's central demand of sovereignty, Mr Singh said he was "willing to listen to whatever concerns that you (PCG) made...I am a servant of the Constitution and you should recognise the complexity of our polity."

On its part, the PCG used its maiden interaction with the government of India — comprising two sessions, one with national security adviser MK Narayanan and the other which also had the prime minister and Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi in attendance — to raise all the issues it wanted the government to address in the course of talks. This not only included a possible ceasefire between the Centre and Ulfa, but

also the release of prisoners including widows of Ulfa cadres killed during the Bhutan Army offensive and around 25 of their children aged 4-10 years said to be in confinement. The PCG also raised the point of Ulfa cadres gone missing in the wake of the Bhutan operation.

Sources in PCG said among the other issues that they would like to raise on behalf of Ulfa include withdrawal of the controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act from Assam. They are said to have been told by the PMO that this law was already under review and there was a proposal to scrap it altogether.

"We brought forward all issues and the prime minister said he was open to discussing all of them," a senior PCG member said adding that the future discussions would take up these concerns one by one.

Arup Borbora, a member of the 11-member PCG, said it was agreed at the meeting that the nearly three-decade long conflict "could be resolved through political negotiations and peace dialogue."

Media adviser to the prime minister Sanjay Baru said Mr Singh thanked Ms Indira Goswami for making the dialogue possible and said that the time had come to end violence.

Apathy personified

Delhi the cause of Manipur's woes

Delhi's insensitivity to Manipur's grievances is largely responsible for making every Manipuri a rebel at heart. This is no overestimation. Manipuris are hurt at the manner in which their princely state was merged with the Indian Union in October 1949; Maharaja Budhachandra was taken to Shillong and was forced to sign the instrument of accession, his plea to consult his people ignored. When Delhi signed the September 1964 ceasefire accord with Naga rebel outfits, Manipur's three hill districts were included, again without the people's consent. Delhi woos militants in other states but shows no such favour to Meitei rebels. When Radhabinod Koijam was chief minister, he declared a unilateral ceasefire but the Centre belittled it. The writ of the government does not run beyond 10 km of the seat of power.

Meitei rebels are as respected as they are feared. While one group has endeared itself by fighting the drug menace, another is concentrating on weeding out corruption in administration and malpractices in examinations. So bitter is the anger against "Delhi mafias" that they have banned the screening of Hindi movies, music and signboards since 2000. Demand for payment from government employees recently forced many to either resign or go on leave. There is no single person who has not contributed to militants' upkeep. But local analysts think the alleged killing of Salam Poonam Devi last month by her paramour, said to belong to an urban insurgent group, could well turn out to be their Waterloo. The argument being that if Manorama Devi's alleged abuse and murder in July last year by Assam Rifles' personnel could send Manipur up in flame, Poonam's killing is no less heinous a crime and deserves public condemnation. It would set Manipur will never see the age of reason unless the people decide enough is enough. But who will bell the cat? Clear words flail in the face of arms.

THE STATESMAN

The worm turns

5/6 2/10
Ulfa's bias unjustified

That Ulfa treats Prafulla Mahanta with disdain even if he was respected as chief minister between 1986-90 comes as little surprise because the outfit holds him responsible for the "secret killings" of its cadres' relatives during his second term (1996-2001). Though the one-man Justice JN Sharma Commission in its interim report gives Mahanta a clean chit, Ulfa refuses to agree, describing the inquiry as an eyewash to placate the victims' families. For that matter, the Asom Gana Parishad, Aasu and even the Gogoi government which ordered the probe are not happy with the commission's reports on three of the six cases entrusted to it. It may be unkind of Ulfa to forget Mahanta's good turn in looking the other way when it was frantically building its camps in Upper Assam's Lakhpathar reserve forest in the late 1980s. And also the fact that it was someone in the Mahanta government who leaked the "classified document" about Operation Bajrang in November 1990 and helped top Ulfa leaders escape before the army could step in, but for which most of them would have been in the dragnet. Although Mahanta later admitted never seeing the "classified document" in question, the fact remains he was in charge.

But why must Ulfa oppose Mahanta's bid to stage a comeback? A fundamental tenet of democracy is freedom. Mahanta, who now presides over the breakaway AGP (Progressive), is preparing for the 2006 assembly elections, like the others. Ulfa may want a government of its preference after the poll, but that is for the electorate to decide. Mahanta may have made mistakes and denigrated the AGP but in the popularity poll he still seems to score over others. For one, Ulfa can never hope to hijack Assam politics as did the militant Bodo Liberation Tigers, and as the NSCN(IM) is attempting in Nagaland.

THE STATESMAN

ASSAM ■ Also hits out at former chief minister Prafulla Mahanta

Karbi violence: Gogoi sees Fernandes, Mahajan hand

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP
GUWAHATI, OCTOBER 21

ASSAM Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi today said NDA convenor George Fernandes and BJP general secretary Pramod Mahajan may have had a hand in instigating the ethnic violence in Karbi Anglong district. The statement came as nine more bodies were recovered today from a village hardly 15 kilometres from the district headquarters at Diphu.

"Why did George Fernandes visit Karbi Anglong twice within a short span last month? There is every reason to suspect that he (Fernandes) has a role behind this violence," Chief Minister Gogoi told a press conference here today. He then went on to accuse BJP general secretary Pramod Mahajan, former CM Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and

Set up parliamentary panel for probe: George to Kalam

NEW DELHI: NDA convenor and former defence minister George Fernandes on Friday met President A P J Abdul Kalam and sought setting up of a parliamentary committee to probe the Karbi Anglong violence and to solve the problems of people of the area.

Fernandes said there was a lack of understanding of social, economic and political problems of the people of the region, comprising Karbi Anglong and North Chachar hills. He said the hill people were being ignored and "being pushed deeper into social crisis that is dangerously mutating into ethnic bigotry".

—PTI

senior CPI(M-L) leader Jayanta Rongpi as well.

"While it was during Mahanta's (student) days that a large number of Congress and Left party leaders were attacked in Assm, Jayanta Rongpi and his CPI(M-L) are known for their official stand supporting armed struggle," Gogoi said.

Rongpi, three times former Lok Sabha member from the Diphu (Autonomous Hills) constituency, had yesterday slammed the Congress government and particularly ac-

cused state Planning and Development Minister Himanta Biswa Sharma for creating a situation leading to violence between the Karbi and Dimasas tribes in the hill district. Besides politicians, Gogoi also named two little-known outfits — the Red Army and Black Widow — as having a role in inciting violence. "Everybody knows the Red Army is an armed wing created by CPI(M-L) leader Jayanta Rongpi," he added.

Asked if his government was contemplating action

against the leaders he named, the Chief Minister said the judicial probe already instituted by his government would decide after factoring in all aspects of the case. "I do not have any proof with me right now. I also cannot share every detail with the media. But there are reports," the Chief Minister claimed.

Meanwhile, the police in Karbi Anglong today recovered nine more bodies from a village on Lumding Road, about 15 km from Diphu. With this, the death toll in the district has gone up to 88. Sources at Diphu said seven of the bodies had bullet marks, while two others bore injuries inflicted by sharp weapons. Police, on the other hand, suspected that the bodies belonged to members of the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), the Karbi militant group, adding that they must have been shot by cadre of Dima Halam Daoga.

INDIAN EXPRESS

Karbi Anglong violence: Assam SOS to Centre

Gogoi Seeks 15 Companies Of Security Forces As Clashes Leave 75 Dead, 10,000 Homeless

By Mahendra Ved/TNN

New Delhi: Union government officials monitoring the current spell of violence in Assam's Karbi Anglong district, say that this is essentially a turf war among competing militant groups trying to consolidate their influence in time for the assembly elections due in April-May next year.

The bloodshed in the last three weeks has left 75 dead, scores injured and over 10,000 people homeless.

A team of home ministry officials is visiting Assam on Wednesday after chief minister Tarun Gogoi sent an SOS for 15 more companies of para-military forces. The CM has also ordered an inquiry.

Thirty-four people, mostly Karbis, were hacked to death after being dragged out of a Diphu-bound bus at village Zirikindang on Monday morning in the worst incident of the three-week long orgy of violence.

On the ground, it is a fight between the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) and Dima Halim Dagaogah (DHD), both engaged in peace talks with the state government. Both groups have violated the rules of the ceasefire signed with the

state government, moving out of their designated camps with arms.

Officials say violence by these groups can end only if they are disarmed and disbanded. But even an effective mechanism to monitor violations of the ceasefire ground rules by the UPDS and the DHD is lacking.

According to a study, a definite pattern is evident in the recent violence. The origin of the latest troubles can be traced to a grenade explosion on September 24 at Parokhowa, near Nagaon, in which eight persons were injured. The turning point came on September 26, when bodies of three auto-rickshaw drivers, all of them belonging to the Dimasa tribe, were found near the town of Manza.

On October 3, armed men attacked Hemari Terang village, inhabited by Karbi tribals, killing five members of a single family in retaliation.

A cycle of revenge attacks continued till October 10. Before dawn that day, hours before the CM's visit to Karbi Anglong, armed Karbis descended on the Dimasa village of Kheroni, 12 KM from Diphu, and shot five people dead.

Earlier, on October 8 and



FIERY PROTEST: ACP activists burn an effigy of Assam CM Tarun Gogoi and state home minister Rakibul Hussain in protest against the violence in the state, in Guwahati on Tuesday.

Anglong has long been highly volatile. At least four rebel groups operate in the district, of which the UPDS and a faction of the DHD led by Dilip Numisa have entered into a ceasefire with the state government.

The UPDS ceasefire deal with the government dates back to May 23, 2002, while the DHD truce came about on January 1, 2003.

Fratricidal violence among ethnic groups has been common in Karbi Anglong district, spread over a 10,434 square kilometre area, half of which is covered by thick jungles.

There have been clashes between Karbis and Khasis, Karbis and Kukis, and other ethnic confrontations in recent years.

But the Karbi-Dimasa animosity, which has led to the present and bloody clashes, has grown in intensity since mid-2004.

30 houses torched in retaliation

By Prabin Kalita/TNN

Guwahati: Karbis struck early on Tuesday and torched 30 houses under Manja police outpost for the violence of the previous day in which 37 people were killed.

Three columns of the Army, present in the district since September 9, were asked to assist the police and CRPF teams. But there

were no reports of fresh human casualty except the recovery of a bullet-ridden body of a youth, who has been identified as Dilip Das.

DIG (central range) L R Bishnoi told TOI security forces have launched a massive search operation and area-domination exercise in the district. He said additional forces have been rushed to Hamren subdivision in western part of the district.

34 die in Assam massacre

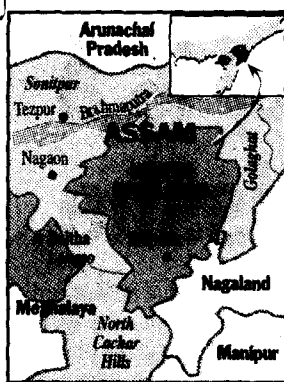
SAMUDRA GUPTA
KASHYAP

GUWAHATI, OCTOBER 17

18/10
9/2-1

ETHNIC tensions in Assam's Karbi Anglong hill district took a bloody turn today with suspected Dimasa tribal militants intercepting two buses and hacking to death 22 Karbi tribals on board. They then moved to a nearby village where they killed another 12 Karbi tribals.

At least 125 houses were torched in what officials are now calling one of the worst outbreaks of ethnic violence in the state. Shoot-at-sight orders have been issued and indefinite curfew imposed. Today's attacks have taken the death toll to 59 since trouble erupted on September 26.



Official sources at Diphu, the Karbi Anglong district headquarters, said that suspected Dimasa militants waylaid two buses at Sarsing under Kheroni police station in Hamren sub-division. They pulled down the Karbi passengers and hacked them. Nine of

the 22 killed were women, official sources said. Sarsing is about 170 km from Diphu.

The militants, who later set the buses afire, also torched Karbi houses at Sarsing. Assam CM Tarun Gogoi asked the Chief Secretary and GOC of the Army's IV Corps to chalk out a strategy to contain the ethnic violence. While the Karbi tribals are a majority in Karbi Anglong, the adjoining North Cachar Hills is dominated by the Dimasa tribals.

Meghalaya burns, curfew on

Police foil bid to set ablaze house of NCP MLA and BDO office

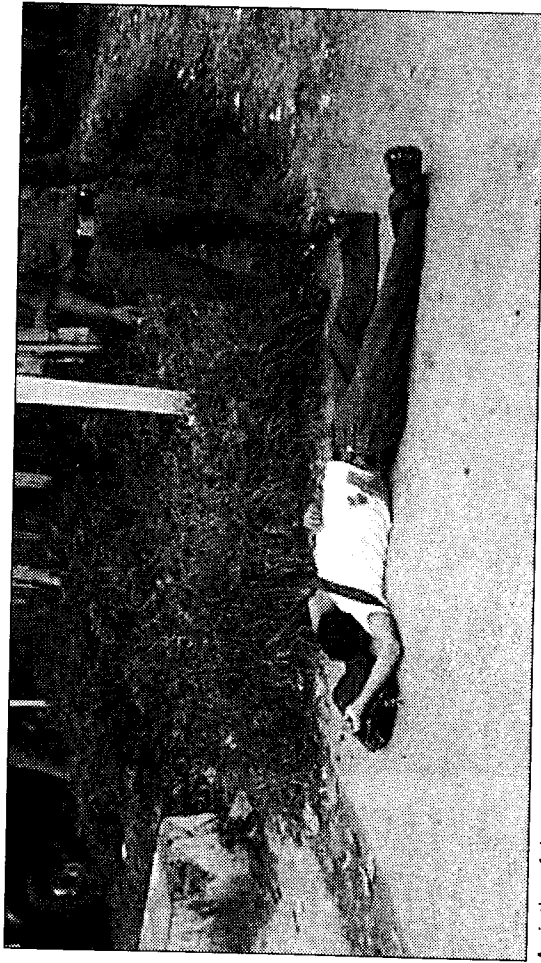
PRESS Trust of India
Shillong, October 2

CURFEW IN Meghalaya's West Garo Hills district headquarters, Tura, was on, while it was relaxed for three hours in the morning in the East Garo Hills district town of Williamsnagar on Sunday, even as attempts were made to set ablaze an NCP MLA's residence and two government offices, the respective district magistrates said.

However, the situation was said to be under control in both the districts.

Curfew was relaxed from 9 am to 12 am at Williamsnagar, said East Garo Hills district magistrate F. Kharlyngdoh. On Saturday, some unidentified arsonists tried to set fire to NCP MLA John M. Marak's home at Mendal in the same district, but timely intervention by the security forces prevented any casualties. Around 10 pm, the miscreants' attempt to set ablaze the BDO office at Songsak was also foiled by the security personnel, but not before bench and notice board at the office were gutted, the DM said. However, there was no report of any violence in Williamsnagar.

West Garo Hills district magistrate L.R. Sangma said that, although the situation was under control in Tura, curfew had not been relaxed. The security forces fired in the air on Saturday to disperse a crowd. Sangma said, but he did not give any details. There was no increase in the death toll — which was put at nine — in either district. The condition of those who sustained bullet



A victim of the violence that rocked Garo Hills last week.

injuries on Friday and were sent to Guwahati for further treatment was stated to be stable.

Curfew was imposed in both the district towns on Friday after police-CRPF firing killed nine people and injured more than 100 in two places almost simultaneously.

The students and the general public gathered in large numbers in those areas at the call of the Garo Students' Union defying prohibitory orders on the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBoSE) revamping is-

sue. The mob turned violent when security personnel arrived at the spot. They threw stones at them, and the police used tear-gas in retaliation. It finally culminated in a lathicharge and firing.

The GSU has been spearheading a non-cooperation movement in the three districts of the Garo Hills region from September 14 and launched an "economic blockade" from September 28.

The students' body was apparently unhappy over the recommendations by a

Tension continues

- No increase in the death toll. Those with bullet injuries were rushed to Guwahati for further treatment.
- The mob turned violent when security personnel arrived at the spot.
- The GSU has been spearheading a non-cooperation movement in the three districts of the Garo Hills from September 14.

state-level committee set up by the Lapang government to revamp the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBoSE) appointing a director for the Board's Shillong region office.

This, the GSU felt, was tantamount to bifurcating the board, headquartered at Tura, and demanded a review of the SLC recommendations.

The MBoSE issue has created a sharp division between the two main tribes of Meghalaya — the Khasis and the Garos.

While the Khasis initially wanted to bifurcate the MBoSE, the Garos opposed it vehemently. The GSU has been demanding a joint director — not a director — to head the Shillong regional office of the board.

Meanwhile, a joint action committee of the Shillong-based Garo outfits and public have urged all Garo employees working in the state, Central and private sectors to take a day's mass casual leave on Monday to express solidarity with the victims.

9 killed in Meghalaya firing

Garos Students' Union had taken out protest rallies defying prohibitory orders

Sushanta Talukdar

GUWAHATI: Nine persons were killed and at least 30 others injured when the police opened fire to disperse protest rallies taken out under the aegis of the Garo Students' Union (GSU) in the districts of West Garo Hills and East Garo Hills of Meghalaya on Friday morning. Meghalaya Deputy Chief Minister Mukul Sangma told *The Hindu* over phone from Shillong that among others, three persons were killed at Tura in West Garo Hills district, while four died at Williamnagar. The actual number of those injured in the firing was yet to be ascertained, he said.

Dr. Sangma said that the district administrations of West Garo Hills and East Garo Hills have clamped a curfew at Tura and Williamnagar. Magisterial probe has also been ordered by both the district administration

into the circumstances leading to police firing.

The GSU had taken out the protest rallies defying prohibitory orders under Section 144 as part of its ongoing agitation in protest against recommendations by State Level Committee on the restructuring of the Meghalaya Board of Secondary Education (MBOSE), which has its headquarters at Tura.

Mr. Sangma said the police resorted to firing as there was a "coordinated attack on policemen and magistrates on duty" by violent mobs in both places. The attack on security personnel led to two magistrates, an additional superintendent of police and 38 police personnel being injured at Tura, while a senior magistrate and 16 police personnel were injured in the attack at Williamnagar.

"We are awaiting the detailed reports from the district administration. We will have to ascer-

tain if today's incidents of attack on police personnel were pre-determined to disturb the law and order situation," Dr. Sangma said. The State Government has decided to pay ex-gratia to the next of kin of the deceased.

An eyewitness said over phone from Tura that a huge crowd, a majority of them women, gathered at Chandmari playground of the hill town in response to a call issued by the GSU. The eye-witness said that the crowd lost their patience when policemen made an attempt to arrest a leader of the GSU who was addressing the crowd. "After some time there was total confusion. We could see the policemen bursting tear-gas shells and blank fire followed by firing on the rallyists when some people started pelting stones on the police personnel. People ran helter-skelter and three persons were left on

the spot."

The D. D. Lapang Government formed an 11-member committee to suggest restructuring and revamping the MBOSE following tremendous pressure from 21 NGO groups, including Khasi Students' Union (KSU). The State witnessed a vigorous movement in both Khasi hills and Garo hills over the issue of restructuring of the MBOSE.

The NGOs of Garo Hills, including the influential GSU, had also resorted to agitation to resist any move to bifurcate the board but suspended the agitation after the Government formed the committee.

However, they resumed their agitation as the NGOs were not satisfied with the recommendations and demanded rectification in the report.

The State Government, however, offered to discuss only after the agitation was withdrawn.

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✓ CEASEFIRE ■ Oscar may finalise deal with Muivah in Amsterdam ✓

Nagas hint at pact renewal

SUDHI RANJAN SEN
NEW DELHI, JUNE 29

NAGA sources say the ceasefire between the Centre and the NSCN(IM), due to expire on July 31, is likely to be renewed.

"We have been assured that the government is serious about resolving the Naga dispute and would do everything possible to meet our demands," a senior member of the delegation which accompanied NSCN(IM) General Secretary T Muivah when he met Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi last Friday said.

The peace progress and Naga demands were discussed at the meeting.

The Naga delegation had kept everyone guessing about the extension of the ceasefire until the meeting with the Prime Minister and the UPA Chairperson. But a team member has now said Friday's meeting has given Nagas fresh

Express EXCLUSIVE

hope about the dispute being resolved.

However, Muivah is likely to be in Amsterdam when the ceasefire comes up for renewal — he is to fly there on

July 4 and will be there for the next few months.

Oscar Fernandes, the leader of the Indian delegation, is likely to fly to Amsterdam to complete the formalities for extending the ceasefire. However, this is yet to be decided.

The extension of the ceasefire is a clear indication that

the peace talks are on course, but the Centre is yet to figure out how to address the Nagas' key demands, which include a special federal relation with India and integration of Naga-inhabited areas.

The Naga delegation has earlier rejected a

government proposal to set up a border commission to resolve the integration problem.

It is learnt that the Naga delegation has said a border commission is unlikely to address the issue.

Meanwhile, the Assam Government has warned the Centre that the NSCN(I-M) is using the peace process to regroup and reinforce the organisational network.

Senior state government officials said they had expressed reservations over the talks and even the ceasefire extension. The Tarun Gogoi Government has conveyed its fears to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and has pressed for a much stronger line against the Nagas.

INDIAN EXPRESS

Manipur again ^{5/10}

When will the killing stop? ^{MS/MS/MS}

The killing of yet another civilian in Manipur by the As-sam Rifles will give added impetus to the 32-party Apunba Lup to intensify its agitation for total withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act from the state. Reports suggest Pheiroijam Kishori Singh, a contractor, was picked up by AR personnel while returning home from his worksite and allegedly killed. This followed an announcement that a man was killed in an encounter and a country-made gun with some rounds of ammunition recovered from him. To justify the encounter they took three members of a local club to the site and allegedly made them sign a paper identifying the victim as a member of a militant organisation. If this was done under duress, it raises suspicions about the AR's claim and the Apunba Lup cannot be faulted for calling it a fake encounter. Coming within a year of the alleged abuse and killing of 32-year-old Manorama Devi by AR personnel while in custody, the incident further inflames public sentiments against the Act. Over the years a school boy and a martial arts expert disappeared without trace after they were picked up by the army. These are only a few instances of how the security forces have been using the Act with scant regard for human rights.

AR jawans involved in the Manorama case are yet to be punished. The AR conducted its own inquiry and has challenged the Manipur government's appointment of a judicial probe into the killing. The Apunba Lup agitation has been subdued following the appointment of a committee to review the AF(SP) Act. Now that it has submitted its report, the sooner this is made public the better.

26 JUN 2006

THE STATESMAN

Floppy drive

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Ulfa insincerity continues

Despite the PMO's formal letter to Ulfa agreeing to discuss its core demand of sovereignty, the general mood among rebel leaders appears to be one of prevarication and ambivalence. Though the PMO's letter was e-mailed to him, self-styled commander-in-chief Paresh Barua continues to harp on Delhi's lack of sincerity for a negotiated settlement. And Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa still wants to see the "hard copy" to convince himself. Obviously Delhi's climbdown caught them unawares. Had Rajkhowa been sincere, he would have settled for talks by now since he is on record as having said he would respond within days and not insist on a neutral venue outside the country if the Centre agreed to discuss sovereignty. With Ulfa now demanding the prior release of ten top leaders from detention, the peace process might well turn out to be a non-starter.

Assam governor, Lt-General (retd) Ajai Singh is right in cautioning the Centre against repeating the 1991 mistake of freeing incarcerated leaders who were supposed to talk their comrades in the jungles into returning and instead joined them. And he knows best since he conducted both Operation Bajrang (1990) and Operation Rhino (1991). While one was of little effect because of a pro-Ulfa state government, the other did force Ulfa into declaring a unilateral and indefinite ceasefire. But for Ulfa's volte face, Assam could have been peaceful today. By adopting a conciliatory stance, chief minister Tarun Gogoi seems to be developing something dangerously close to a vested interest. If the peace process is not to end in a wild goose chase, a time-frame must be set. As for Ulfa's good intentions, that will be apparent if its cadres eschew their murderous ways.

25 JUN 2005

THE STATESMAN

মনোরমা তদন্তে ব্যবস্থা নেওয়ার দায়িত্ব কেন্দ্রকে

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, গুয়াহাটি, ২৩
জুন: মণিপুরের খাংজাম মনোরমার
ধর্ষণ ও হত্যাকাণ্ডের তদন্ত রিপোর্ট
পরীক্ষা করে উপযুক্ত ব্যবস্থা নেওয়ার
দায়িত্ব কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের হাতে ছেড়ে
দিল গৌহাটি হাইকোর্ট। মনোরমা
কাণ্ডে আদালতের এই রায় এমন একটা
সময় ঘোষিত হল, যখন অসম
রাইফেলসের হাতে এক নিরীহ যুবকের
হত্যাকাণ্ডের অভিযোগে ফের উত্তপ্ত
হয়ে উঠছে মণিপুর।

মনোরমা হত্যায়ও অভিযুক্ত অসম
রাইফেলস। ওই ঘটনার পি উপেন্দ্র
কমিশন গঠন করে রাজ্য সরকার।
কমিশন রিপোর্ট জমা দেয় নভেম্বর
মাসে।

কিন্তু অসম রাইফেলসের মতো
একটি কেন্দ্রীয় নিরাপত্তা সংস্থার
বিরুদ্ধে তদন্ত করার জন্য কোনও রাজ্য
সরকার কমিশন গঠন করতে পারে
কিনা, সেই যৌক্তিকতা নিয়ে প্রশ্ন তুলে
গৌহাটি হাইকোর্টে মামলা করেন দুই
জওয়ান কর্ণেল জগমোহন সিংহ এবং
নায়ক-সুবেদার দিগম্বর দত্ত। এই নিয়ে
দীর্ঘ শুনানির পরে আজ রায় ঘোষণা
করেন বিচারপতি ডি বিশ্বাস।

বিচারপতি বলেছেন, পরিস্থিতির
कारणे কমিশন হল নিশ্চিত ভাবেই
একটি 'ফ্যাক্ট-ফাইন্ডিং বডি', যারা
তথ্যের উপর ভিত্তি করে ঘটনা
সাজিয়ে সুপারিশ-সহ একটি রিপোর্ট
তৈরি করে তা 'উপযুক্ত সরকারের'
কাছে পেশ করবে। কিন্তু মণিপুর
সরকার সেই উপযুক্ত সরকার নয়,
রাজ্যে অবস্থানরত সশস্ত্র বাহিনীর
উপরে যাদের কোনও প্রশাসনিক
নিয়ন্ত্রণ রয়েছে।

এটা যদি একটা দিক হয়, তবে
অন্য দিকে, 'আফস্পা'-র নিয়ন্ত্রণে থাকা

সশস্ত্র বাহিনীর বিরুদ্ধে কেন্দ্রীয়
সরকারের অনুমতি ছাড়া কোনও
আইনগত ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া যায় না।
কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারই একমাত্র সেই
উপযুক্ত সরকার, সশস্ত্র বাহিনীর উপর
যাদের পূর্ণ নিয়ন্ত্রণ রয়েছে।

এমতাবস্থায় উপেন্দ্র কমিশনের
'সিল' করা রিপোর্ট কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র
দফতরের সচিবের কাছে অবিলম্বে
পাঠিয়ে দেওয়া জন্য মণিপুর
সরকারকে নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন বিচারপতি
বিশ্বাস। তিনি এও বলেছেন, জনগণের
তথ্য জানার অধিকারের কথা মনে
রেখে কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র দফতরও দ্রুত
রিপোর্ট প্রকাশ করার উদ্যোগ নিক।
বিচারপতি বিশ্বাস মন্তব্য করেছেন,
মণিপুরের মানুষ বিচার চান সে জন্য
সংবিধান ও আইনের প্রতি তাঁদের
আস্থা ফেরাতে রিপোর্ট প্রকাশ করা
এবং তাতে ১৭ নম্বর অসম
রাইফেলসের জওয়ানদের অভিযুক্ত
করা হলে উপযুক্ত ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া
দরকার।

আজ থেকে শুরু হওয়া মণিপুর
বিধানসভা অধিবেশনেই উপেন্দ্র
কমিশনের দীর্ঘ প্রতিশ্রুতি রিপোর্ট পেশ
হয়ে যাবে—আদালতের রায় এমনটাই
নির্দেশ দেবে বলে মনে করেছিল
মনোরমার পরিবার এবং 'আফস্পা'
প্রত্যাহারের দাবিতে সরব বিভিন্ন
সংগঠন। কিন্তু বল কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের
কোর্টে চলে যাওয়ায় ফের অনিশ্চয়তা
তৈরি হল বলে মনে করছে 'ভাসং'
পাশাপাশি, মনোরমার মতো
কেশরজিতের হত্যাকাণ্ডের পরে সেই
অসম রাইফেলসের বিরুদ্ধেই যে
অভিযোগ উঠেছে, তা নিয়ে মণিপুর
সরকারেরও তদন্ত করার সম্ভাবনাও
খারিজ হয়ে গেল।

INFILTRATION MENACE-I

Fear Of Socio-Political Tensions In The North-East

By BIBHUTI BHUSAN NANDY

Illegal immigration from Bangladesh acquired the proportions of a demographic invasion in the frontline states of Assam, Tripura and West Bengal long ago. But thanks to our inability or unwillingness to address the problem, it has continued unabated to this day. Consequently, the already overpopulated country is saddled with no fewer than 20 million foreigners who take up jobs as Indian citizens, occupy public land, strain civic amenities and welfare services, and cause social tension and environmental degradation. Above all, illegal immigration on such a massive scale has eroded national sovereignty, besides threatening India's stability and security.

It is an open secret that, driven by their narrow partisan interests, two of our major political parties have actively promoted immigration for years. If the CPI-M has systematically supported infiltration to enlarge its electoral support base in West Bengal, there is no denying that the Congress has been equally guilty of committing the same sin in Assam.

Manipulations

Manipulations lately being resorted to by the Assam Congress, especially chief minister Tarun Gogoi, to leave infiltrators undisturbed with an eye on the state assembly election next year, have upset right-thinking people who value national security and integrity above the electoral interests of any party.

Of the estimated 20 million illegal migrants settled in the country, six million are in Assam. By virtue of their numerical strength they decide the electoral outcome in 56 of the total 120 state assembly constituencies. Aware of their political clout, the Gogoi government, supported by the Congress-led UPA government at the Centre, has stopped all operations aimed containing the flow of infiltration and called off the drive to deport the illegals.

The UPA government's policy of soft-peddalling the infiltration issue is evident from statements made by Union home minister Shivraj Patil and his minister of state Satya Prakash Jaiswal. In an attempt to minimise the gravity of the problem, Jaiswal has questioned in Parliament the veracity of his ministry's estimate of 20 million illegal immigrants in the country. This abrupt and arbitrary repudiation of the immigration statistics collected through painstaking research by government agencies, demographers and academic institutions has provided Dhaka a handle to rubbish the Indian

The author is former Additional Secretary, Research and Analysis Wing

claim of infiltration from Bangladesh as a myth. Patil, for his part, has observed that the illegal migrants issue needed a humane approach which, in effect, was an excuse for inaction.

Lt.-General S K Sinha, during his tenure as governor of Assam, prepared a comprehensive report showing how no-holds-barred infiltration was undermining

to get rid of the infiltrators. The NDA government's move to repeal the law remained pending for a few years, and the UPA government finally shelved it last month. Unimpeded infiltration from Bangladesh has completely changed the demographic profile of the frontline states of Assam, Tripura and West Bengal and has seriously upset the com-



national security. His successor, Ajai Singh, has confirmed that up to 6,000 Bangladeshis illegally enter Assam every day. The outgoing judge of the Illegal Immigrants Detection Tribunal has averred that infiltration is continuing unabated. Yet in April this year, the Union home ministry overturned its earlier decision to deport 3,000 migrants (an inconsequential, symbolic figure, in any case) each year purportedly because North Block was said to have suddenly discovered that the scheme was "unimplementable".

What followed thereafter was worse. In the face of a show of resistance by the Bangladesh Rifles, the government has put on hold the barbed wire fencing along the border, which is considered the only dependable barrier to stop people from illegally entering India and to guard against smuggling, cross-border terrorism and a whole range of other border crimes. Assam shares a 272-km-long border with Bangladesh, a vast stretch of which still remains unfenced, encouraging infiltration and facilitating entry and exit at will of Bangladesh-based Ulfa combatants and other north-east insurgents, and import of weapons by them.

Communal balance

The Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act was especially enacted in the mid-1980s to facilitate detection and deportation of the migrants from Assam, but in practice it hinders rather than help efforts

munal balance in the border districts of these states. Bangladeshi smugglers, touts, terrorists and criminals in collusion with their Indian counterparts and corrupt BSF and police officials have established effective control over the outlying border areas of these states. As a result, the Bangladesh frontier has, as it were, moved several kilometers inside Indian territory.

Video cassettes containing inflammable communal propaganda material imported by Bangladeshi migrants openly circulate in the border districts of West Bengal and the Barak Valley of Assam, boosting Islamic fundamentalism in the regions. Mullahs in Murshidabad district have imposed social and economic boycott against *Sufi bauls* who sing paeans of humanism, but the state administration has turned a blind eye to such acts of intransigence lest action against the miscreants affect Left Front vote bank.

Bangladeshi infiltrators in collusion with local CPI-M cadres and mafia dons have unleashed a reign of terror in the outlying panchayats of Nadia, Murshidabad and Malda districts. Many migrants openly cultivate *ganja* in border areas on land bought from local Hindus who are fleeing to towns for security. The contraband is smuggled to Bangladesh in exchange for firearms and explosives that land at ethnic and Maoist insurgent bases in North Bengal, Assam and Nepal.

Needless to say, the CPI-M-

underworld nexus helps fill the party coffers. In the backdrop of these stark realities, the dilly-dallying by the state and Union governments in addressing the problem of illegal immigration has produced backlash in the Upper Assam districts. A hitherto unknown organisation called Chiring Chapori Yuva Morcha in Dibrugarh has imposed economic sanctions against migrants, including denial of employment. As the blockade got under way, Bangladeshi workers began fleeing away from the Upper Assam districts to the immigrants-dominated five districts of Dhubri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Morigaon and Nowgaon, aggravating, in the process, the existing communal imbalance in the Lower Assam region.

Warning

The success of the Chiring Chap Yuva Morcha's anti-migrant campaign has induced other groups like All Assam Students Union, Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chhatra Parishad, Tai Ahom Students Union and Motok Students Union also to join the movement. Initially, the Congress supported the movement but later, fearing that the BJP and AGP would hog political mileage from the campaign, the state government has issued a mild warning against harassing the minorities. The All Assam Minority Students Union, for its part, has warned the central and state governments of an "unexpected situation" if stern action is not taken against "communal leaders" who are responsible for the exodus of working class minorities from the Upper Assam region.

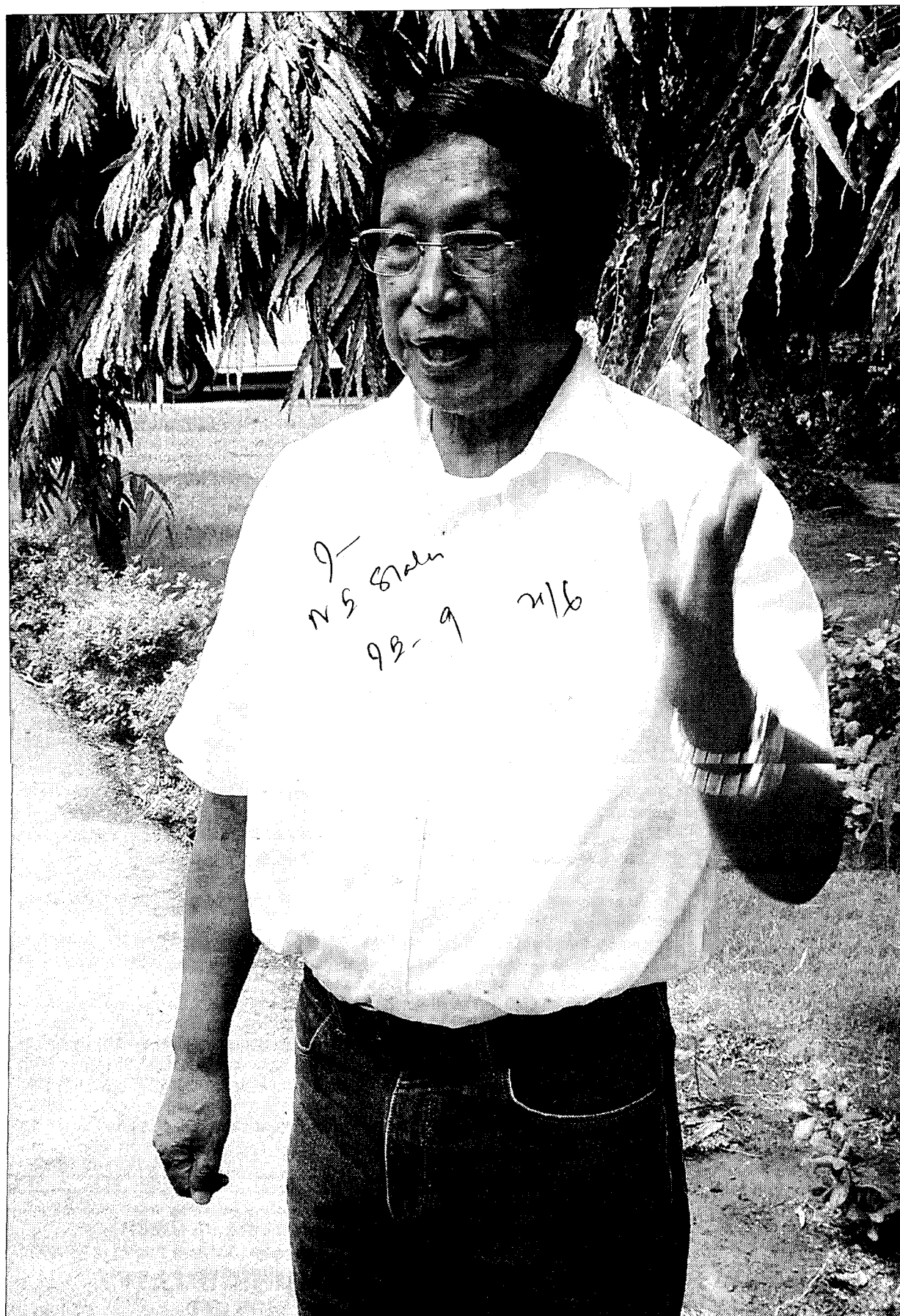
Assam and Tripura are no strangers to catastrophic communal and ethnic mayhem as a response to uncontrolled illegal immigration. In the eighties, these two states witnessed devastating pogroms against migrants at Nellie in Assam and Mandai in Tripura. The fear among sons of the soil of losing out their distinct identities to outsiders has generated deep-rooted socio-political tensions and sparked off insurgencies in Assam and the rest of the north-east region.

West Bengal has been relatively free from communal tensions, but lately in the far-flung rural belt of South Bengal circulation by Bangladeshi migrants of cassettes denigrating Hindu gods and goddesses has triggered inter-community clashes killing a number of people. If the Left Front continues to ignore the prejudicial activities of the Muslim fundamentalist fringe, communal tensions will mount and spread to other areas in the state and beyond.

(To be continued)

'Solution can be possible only when the Indian government respects the reality of the Nagas'

The ceasefire in the Naga hills still holding, he was here at the invitation of the Government to find a way to end the decades-old insurgency. Thuingaleng Muivah, the M in the I-M faction of the NSCN, the dominant Naga insurgent outfit, speaks to Shekhar Gupta, Editor-in-Chief of *The Indian Express*, on NDTV 24x7's *Walk the Talk* programme. Excerpts from the interview



ON THE RECORD

T. MUIVAH
General Secretary, NSCN

■ **What does it feel like now to be guest of the Government of India, you were fighting them, hiding from them for four decades?**

We have been accorded hospitality and are thankful to them for that. But the greater question is that the issue is political and they have to appear to understand us.

■ **But do you think some understanding has developed now?**

Yes, because they have recognised the uniqueness of history, a very significant step taken from the Indian side.

■ **But are you happy now that the fighting is over?**

It is hard to say that the fighting is over. Despite the declaration of ceasefire, fighting is going on there because Indian armed forces used to attack our camps. So, sometimes it is difficult to predict.

■ **But it's very little compared with what it was then. Yes, yes, that's right.**

■ **Where do you see the talks going now? One feels you have been disappointed or bored or tired.**

It has now taken more than seven years and it is time for us to have substantial understanding between us, which is still not there.

■ **So you are getting the seven-year itch as they say in a marriage. How have you found dealing with Indian officials and politicians?**

Well, some are quite sensible and very understanding but that is not the case with all of them. We claim that they have understood much better now because we have made our stand sufficiently clear to them and it is for them to make their own decision now.

■ **But are you disappointed? As you have said sometimes, 'I am disappointed, I am going away'.**

I am not that disappointed but after talking for so many years if nothing substantial comes up, no one will be happy.

■ **So it's not that you are going away in anger. No, this is not the case.**

■ **But you are going away? Yes, we need to go out because we have had sufficient time here.**

■ **So where are you headed now? I will be heading for Europe.**

■ **Summer-time is a good time to go to Europe if you can't go to Nagaland. Yes, but I went to Nagaland last year.**

■ **It must be a strange feeling to have earlier fought the Indian Armed forces and now being under their protection.**

Yes, of course. This is a fact now. There is an understanding and practically, there is no point for me to be apprehensive.

■ **You are one of the most protected people in Delhi. Even the most protected people can go out for a walk but not you. Do you think that by this time, you should have felt more secure personally. Who are your enemies?**

The Government of India is taking special care of us and sees to it that nothing happens to us. That is very kind of them and it shows their concern.

■ **So tell me your experiences about dealing with our negotiators?**

Well, some (Indian offi-

cial) are quite sensible and very understanding but that is not the case with all of them. We claim that they have understood much better now because we have made our stand sufficiently clear to them and it is for them to make their own decision now.

■ **How much distance remains to be covered?**

Well, it is hard to say but you know it's a long time now since we started talking. And it is a fact that they have come to understand the uniqueness of Naga history. Our history is very clear.

■ **What is that uniqueness of your history, if you could tell me in brief.**

Well, Nagas and Nagaland were never conquered by any alien nation, including India. It is the first point of our uniqueness. Sec-

ondly, Nagas are the first settlers of Nagaland and we fought against the British for 48 years and they occupied a small portion, which is another uniqueness. And when it was imminent that the British were to leave Indian Nagaland, our men told them that any arrangement without consultation with the Nagas will not be acceptable to them...they were sufficiently aware of their political rights and then they went on to meet Mahatma Gandhi who gave his commitment in no uncertain terms that Nagas have every right to be independent.

■ **But Mahatma Gandhi had a way of saying it. He said there will be a place where you can enjoy the glow of freedom which he could have said to any commitment in India.**

He said Nagas have a right to be independent because he knew the history of Nagas and he had respect for history.

■ **What is the way out now, given the realities of today's world that cartographical changes are impractical.**

Historical facts are to be taken into consideration first. Because of the changes in demography, facts of history cannot be dismissed altogether. We declared our independence on 14th August 1947, one day before India did. And when in 1950, the Union of India was formed for the first time in history, Nagas were also invited to become a part but Nagas refused. This histori-



cal fact cannot be ignored under any circumstance and that is the reason why Nagas were never a part of the Indian Union, either by conquest or consent.

■ **What is your ideal solution?**

Solution can be possible only when the Indian government respects the reality of the Nagas.

On our part, we will take any possible step to come closer and get the problem solved through peaceful means. But if big brothers like India will depend on the big stick, of course, we will not accept that

■ **According to you, what are the five points which if the Government of India accepts there can be peace and tranquility?**

We have tried to understand the leaders of India and we have come closer because there must be a solution. So the positive steps we have been taking are sub-

stantial.

■ **Now what has changed? Here we have to understand the importance of interdependence, we cannot be enmity to India and vice-versa. Then what should be the meeting point, we have to understand. And if we can appreciate the difficulties on the part of the Indian Government, that has to be the first step.**

■ **But you do appreciate that? Yes, we appreciate that but the Indian Government should understand our difficulties. That is what they have not yet done. So the problem is not with us but**

with them still.

■ **So your difficulties are that whatever settlement takes place there has to be some feeling of autonomy, sovereignty?**

No, no. Here, the question is this: Since the Government of India has recognised the uniqueness of

ferent question. But upholding the just cause of the people is always first and foremost. One has to safeguard that so that the problem can be solved.

■ **But you are a young man for your age. I shall not mention it, may be you can. Thank you, thank you. I think I am still strong enough.**

■ **Pushing 70? Right? Here, the question is that if there are any means to settle the problem with peace why not for that. And there is nothing wrong.**

■ **The fascinating thing about you is that you are not only one of the most experienced guerrilla fighters of the world, you are also among the best educated. You have a post-graduation in political science from Gauhati University. And in your fighting years, you had education and re-education, you were almost a socialist revolutionary first when you went to China. Tell me a little bit about your trek to China.**

Then I was 20 years old.

■ **That was in 1964.**

China was, at that time, one of the most respected nations of the world and how could a child be sent there to talk to great people there?

■ **And this is when India and China had just had the war and Nehru had just died in 1964.**

You are right, you are right. At last, I accepted the order from the government and I went there. Along with me, 133 cadets went and it took more than three months. The commander, my friend, was General Thinsielie.

■ **Tell me a little bit of your days in Beijing. What happened, why did you first go? You met Chou En-lai...**

I have great respect for Chinese leaders and the Chinese people. I see in them greatness and so I have admiration for them. They tried to understand our point of view and that is in a way inspiring. Because great people like Chou En-lai had the patience to listen to us and we were able to make our position very clear to them when they understood us. Of course, they were very happy.

■ **Tell me about your first meeting with Chou En-Lai**

Yes, he is a big man, admired all over the world. He had the patience to listen to us. And I admired that kind of attitude. Great men behave that way and it is a great lesson for us. He great lesson for us. He would support the revolutionary cause.

■ **Scato Swu, remember him, he was the president of provisional government for some time, then became a Member of Parliament. I respect him.**

■ **I was once driving with him during the 1982 elections and I asked him that in 1962, the Indian Army had left the northeast, the Chinese were here who were your friends, then why did you not take over? And he said something very interesting. He said some of us thought of our experiences in China, we thought of the lack of religious freedom and the way the Tibetan culture had been squashed. And we thought Nagas are wise people and may be in future it's better to make peace with India in self-respecting terms. Do you agree with that?**

That might have been his reasoning but I feel, I would have rather preferred the kind of conclusion that would have been drawn from own experiences.

■ **And what is that? Everything has its end and changes would be there.**

■ **Do you think rebellion is having its end now? Is it leading to politics?**

No, that is not the case. It depends on the nature of the issue. If exploitation is justified, we have to go on fighting.

■ **But in today's situation, do you think you are heading toward peace and politics or towards fighting in the bush?**

So long as India believes in military might to solve the problem, there can be no meeting point. We can go on fighting. But in 1994, three generals declared that a military solution was no longer possible. It was a political issue, which could be solved through political means. If the Government of India has realised the futility of military might, we have to accept that. We have to come forward and talk.

■ **And are you getting the**

sense that the Indian Government is more positive, more practical and more understanding now?

So far as they believe in a political solution, you are right. But how far can that be proved from the Indian side. So it is still a big issue.

■ **So right, now you are not pessimistic?**

I am not pessimistic but there is no point for me to be optimistic always.

■ **So when you go overseas, when do you see yourself coming back and resuming the process? Or can the process carry on even when you are outside?**

Yes, it can. But it depends to what extent the Government of India is prepared to understand the Nagas and respect the reality of our history. That will decide. On our part, we will take any possible step to come closer and get the problem solved through peaceful means. But if the big brothers like India will depend on the big stick, of course, we will not accept that.

■ **Well, it's always that one who wields the big stick must also speak softly. Does the Government of India speak softly with you?**

Sometimes softly, but sometimes they change their tone.

■ **And what do they say to you?**

Sometimes in a manner of threatening they would talk.

■ **Even now?**

Not now, in the beginning. So we had to lash out. We had to retaliate saying we have our history, you have your history. It is good if we respect each other.

■ **Nobody underrates the Naga soldiers. Even in the Indian army, the Naga regiment is very highly rated. During the Kargil war, the Nagas fought very well.**

Maybe so. But politically speaking, if they don't have regard for the rights of the Naga people and the positive steps taken by them, there will be no meeting point. If they start imposing their Constitution on us, we will not accept that. We can accept a negotiated settlement, but we will not accept any kind of imposition, today or tomorrow.

■ **Once you are negotiating why should there be any imposition? Do you think what you accept will be acceptable to all tribes and sub-tribes of Nagas?**

Sure, we believe that.

■ **You were not seen as an outsider by the Nagas as you come from Manipur...**

No, no.

■ **When I covered the Northeast, one really struggled because there were so many languages in Nagaland. So do you tell the Government of India, mafarimo (never mind), let's move on to the future.**

Yes, that's why you are finding me here. Because we don't bring guns here and that's a change but the Indian government may not appreciate that.

■ **I am sure they do appreciate that and I am sure it leads to real change in the future...**

Let's hope so but let's not be presumptuous.

■ **Let me also tell you that none of us can be fighting for 40 years and still be fit and tough like you.**

If anybody forces me, I can still go further because I don't come here to surrender my rights.

Bodos hail ceasefire agreement



RALLYING FOR PEACE: Bodos backing the ceasefire agreement between the NDFB and the Central Government at a rally at Udalgiri near Indo-Bhutan border on Friday. — PHOTO: RITU RAJ KONWAR

Sushanta Talukdar

UDALGURI: Bodos on Friday welcomed the ceasefire agreement between the National Democratic Front of Boroland and the Centre and pledged their support to the peace process. The ceasefire agreement came into effect on June 1 for a period of

one year. Thousands of Bodos clad in traditional attire attended a peace rally organised by the All-Boro Peace Forum here to mobilise public support for the peace process. However, they were disappointed by the absence of NDFB leaders, who had to rush to Guwahati for a meeting of the Ceasefire Monitoring

Group. A 12-member NDFB delegation, led by general secretary Govinda Basumatary, attended the meeting chaired by Rajiv Agarwal, Joint Secretary in the Home Ministry.

Forum chairman Moniram Mochahari said the peace process must have the support of the masses for a meaningful dia-

logue and a lasting solution.

Assam Home Commissioner B.K. Gohain told *The Hindu* over telephone from Guwahati that the ceasefire monitoring group discussed the setting up of designated camps for the NDFB cadres and other formalities relating to the implementation of ground rules of the agreement.

PMO talks invite: ULFA delays response

Letter said to have reached

ULFA chief by May 13

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP

GUWAHATI, JUNE 16

THE letter from National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan inviting ULFA for talks may have reached commander-in-chief Paresh Barua but there are no signs that the group will respond as quickly as expected by the PMO or writer Indira Goswami, the 'mediator' between the two sides. Sources said the letter

10 ULFA militants surrender

■ DHUBRI (ASSAM): Ten ULFA militants, including a sergeant major, surrendered on Thursday, Army sources said. The insurgents, led by Sgt Maj Amit Chandra Mandal laid down three .303 rifles, three 9-mm pistols, two Chinese grenades, two 0.22 pistols, a 0.38 revolver and large quantity of ammunition. —PTI

reached Barua "either on May 12 or 13". Barua had, within a few days of receiving the e-mailed version of the letter, demanded release of all central council members so that they could discuss it.

The Centre's letter notwithstanding, ULFA continues to suspect the intentions of the government. "...the reinforcement of Indian occupational

forces by double the original strength is not conducive to creating a positive environment for dialogue," says an editorial in the latest issue of *Freedom*, the ULFA mouthpiece.

The newsletter claimed that the group had waived two of the three pre-conditions it had set (holding talks in a foreign country and having an independent UN observer for the

process). "The only condition we now retain is that dialogue should be on the core issue of restoration of Assam's sovereignty. However, instead of responding with statesmanship, the Government of India resorted to disinformation trying to brand ULFA a terrorist organisation," the editorial says.

Though the ruling Congress is happy over the developments in view of the Assembly elections in April-May next year, Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi has put the ball in the Centre's court, saying he has no problem in releasing top ULFA leaders.

Though ULFA's support base has been eroding,

it still plays a major role in the elections. In the 2001 polls, for instance, more than 30 AGP workers and supporters were gunned down, a fallout of the then CM taking a tough stand against the group.

Given this backdrop, the dialogue with ULFA can come in handy for the Congress to bulldoze the AGP, which is already down due to the rift between party chief Brindaban Goswami and former CM Mahanta.

But the Congress denies seeking help from ULFA. "We have never taken ULFA's support," says CM Gogoi. "Our performance has been good. The people will vote us to power again," he told *Express*.

Govt lacks political will: Ulfa

Guwahati, June 16

HP-3
12/6/05 J. N. B. Guleri

THE ULFA on Thursday accused New Delhi of trying to scuttle its peace initiatives by militarising the region. "When the process of beginning a dialogue between the Ulfa and the Government of India has already been set in motion, the reinforcement of Indian occupation forces (security forces) in Assam by doubling the original strength is not conducive to creating a positive environment," an Ulfa statement said.

This only betrays the Government of India's real intention, that is, military suppression of our legitimate national liberation struggle, the statement further added.

The rebel group said that it wanted peace talks with the government to end close to three decades of violent insurgency in the region. "Dialogue

REBEL CHARGE

- Ulfa claimed New Delhi wants to scuttle the peace process by increasing the Army presence
- The group also reiterated its wish to find a solution for ending three decades of violence in the region

must be the medium for resolving the conflict sincerely and magnanimously. This is the only road to lasting peace in this part of the world without shedding blood any more," the Ulfa statement said.

"We waived two of the three pre-conditions for dialogue with Government of India. This was a sincere step towards finding a satisfactory solution to the conflict," it added.

The Ulfa was earlier demanding that

peace talks be held in a third country and under the supervision of UN representatives. "The only condition we now retain is that dialogue should be on the core issue of restoration of Assam's sovereignty."

The rebel group last month sent a letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on starting negotiations. New Delhi has since responded to Ulfa's peace overtures by sending a formal letter inviting the rebel leadership for talks.

But the Ulfa claims it is to yet to receive the letter. Two weeks ago, Ulfa commander-in-chief Paresw Baruah demanded the release of at least four senior jailed guerrilla leaders as a pre-condition to holding talks.

Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi said that the government was ready to release the imprisoned leaders if it receives a formal letter from the Ulfa leadership.

IANNS

17 JUN 2005 THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

The shadow of the foreigner

THE Bangladeshi influx issue has suddenly returned to Assam's political agenda. This time it is in the form of a farce. From 1979 to 1985 Assam witnessed a powerful campaign that sought the expulsion of "foreigners" — supposedly hundreds of thousands in number. The Assam movement transformed the state's political landscape. The prolonged civil disobedience campaign marginalised national political parties and when the movement ended in 1985, the leaders formed the Asom Gana Parishad that has twice since formed the government in Assam.

A radical fringe of the Assam movement became the United Liberation Front of Assam and six years of campaigning on the "foreigners" issue brought to the surface cracks in Assam's social fabric. The infamous Nellie massacre took place during this time and the movement created the ground for the tribal rebellions that have lasted till this day.

While the influx issue then was a tool in the hands of youthful rebels taking on the establishment, the first salvo this time was launched by none other than the Governor of Assam, Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Ajai Singh. In the early 1990s he was the GOC of the 4 corps of the Indian army based in Assam and had commanded two Indian army operations against ULFA. With Operation Bajrang and Operation Rhino, says Singh in his official resume, "I smashed the ULFA insurgency in less than three months, creating a record in counter-insurgency operations."

In a speech prepared for a conference of governors in February of this year (that had to be cancelled) and widely reported in the local press, Singh described the Indo-Bangladeshi border as "one of the world's most fluid borders, crossed daily, border officials say, by some 6,000 Bangladeshis who come in search of work, often staying on to join the estimated 20 million illegal immigrants already in the



Assam must address the influx issue in ways that look to the future

■ SANJIB BARUAH

country." He expressed concern that Bangladeshi settlements in border districts could provide "trans-border support for secessionist and separatist insurgency movements in our state." Singh's speech has had perhaps unintended resonance in Assam. A little known youth group in Dibrugarh gave a call for economic boycott of "Bangladeshis" that led to hundreds of poor people fleeing the area. If the improbable actors in the drama were not enough to make this a farce, the means that the youth group chose to spread its message surely did. It sent an SMS message that read, "Save nation, save identity. Let's take an oath: no food, no job, no shelter to a

sam's problem with immigration — legal and illegal — is not real. Indian census figures read against Bangladeshi census figures make it abundantly clear that the region continues to attract immigrants from Bangladesh as well as from other parts of India. Northeast India is one of South Asia's last frontiers. The Partition did not put an end to the population movement from land-scarce areas of eastern Bengal to these historically land abundant areas that began in the early part of the last century. By adding Hindu refugees to the flow, it only intensified the trend. Assam remained an attractive destination for potential settlers partly because of the govern-

deshis in Assam assumes that they are all potential settlers like earlier generations of immigrants, the reality may be more complex. The mass seasonal movement by the labouring poor in South Asia has now acquired a transnational dimension. Yet to save themselves from police and vigilante harassment, even seasonal migrants may have to seek protection in some form of official documentation claiming Indian citizenship.

Chief minister Gogoi's critique of Governor Singh is an acknowledgment of the ground reality — the importance of the "immigrant" vote to the Congress. The same compulsions of electoral politics had led even the ethnic Assamese-centric AGP to soft-pedal the foreigners' issue once it entered electoral politics. Their detractors might call it vote bank politics or the power of the "Bangladeshi lobby". But one person's vote bank is another person's survival shield. To end the stalemate, we must begin looking for solutions that are not unilateral, but built on cooperation with the source country. ULFA's warning about the dangers of trying to evict Bangladeshis suggest that even what was once the radical fringe of the Assam movement is today sensitive to the risks of instigating vigilantism on the influx question. But unfortunately, our counter-insurgency establishment would much rather describe this position as evidence of its complicity with the Bangladeshi "enemy".

The good news is that there are trends in Assam's politics today that seek to address the influx question in ways that look to the future. The bad news is that our security establishment seems bent on fighting these trends. The former Assam Governor Lt. Gen (Retd.) S.K. Sinha even had a word for it: he called it a psychological weapon in his counter-insurgency arsenal.

While the influx issue, then, was a tool in the hands of youthful rebels taking on the establishment, the first salvo this time was launched by the governor of Assam

Bangladeshi." An English-language SMS as a tool for political propaganda is a far cry from the wall posters, street plays and popular music of the 1980s.

There is no risk of this farce destabilising the elected government. Chief minister Tarun Gogoi has called Governor Singh's numbers "baseless", though one wonders how he seems so certain. The opposition AGP leadership has expressed sympathy for the action of the Dibrugarh youth group. But given its inability to act on the influx issue while in power, the AGP does not have the credibility it had two decades ago. ULFA's chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa has warned that the eviction of suspected Bangladeshi illegal migrants puts indigenous Muslims at risk.

No one would argue that As-

ment's cavalier attitude to its responsibilities as custodian of public lands — be it forests or the flood plains of the Brahmaputra. This has had serious costs in terms of the environment and quality of life. A compromised system of obtaining official documentation enables foreigners to become citizens.

Most suspected Bangladeshis fleeing from Dibrugarh were poor people working in building sites as well as rickshaw pullers. Random conversations with people in these occupations indicate that these days a significant number of them are seasonal migrants from other parts of India as well as from Bangladesh. They come in response to the massive labour demand in the region's booming construction industry. While the discourse on Bangla-

Baruah is author of 'Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India'

Central pressure on Mizos, Chins

By Meera Sundar

A major crackdown on the Chin National Front (CNF) is on the cards with the home ministry in New Delhi directing the Mizoram government and Assam Rifles to launch operations to drive out the insurgent group from Myanmar, based in the remote north-eastern state of Mizoram that borders Myanmar. "It's pay-back time for the Indian government as Myanmar kept its word by launching offensives against Indian rebel groups operating from their Burma bases," said an authoritative source. The latest development took place on 29 May, when a high-level delegation from the home ministry, headed by Special Secretary, Internal Security, Anil Choudhury and Joint Secretary (North East), Rajiv Agarwal, visited Mizoram and discussed plans against the underground Chin rebels.

ing was signed during the state visit of the head of the Myanmar government, Senior General Than Shwe. In the agreement, both India and Myanmar agreed to take steps to prevent cross-border crime, including drug trafficking and arms smuggling, and to upgrade bilateral cooperation.

The deal was sealed with the signing of an MoU on coopera-

violation of the law of the land and an impediment to our good relation with the neighbouring country of Myanmar. This is just not acceptable," officials said.

The Chin ethnic group, which dominates the Chin State and Sagaing Division in Myanmar, joined the general movement for democracy against the military junta in

group is now led by Fugkunga. The Chins are close to the Mizos and they have many things in common, including Christianity, language, cuisine, dress and other elements of culture.

Many Chin migrants from Myanmar have married Mizo girls and settled down, claiming Indian citizenship in the past two decades. Estimates of the number of Chins in Mizoram vary, but many agree that it is at least 50,000 or a large chunk of the state's population.

These include a small number of political refugees while the majority are economic migrants. Many exiles are also in Delhi where over 600 have been given refugee status by the UN High Commission for Refugees' office there. This entitles them to a small dole, protection from deportation, non-harassment by the police and an opportunity to work or look for employment.

Many Mizos criticise their

Open Forum

tion in non-traditional security. The joint declaration agreed that economic development of the region along the India-Myanmar border required special focus. Both sides expressed satisfaction that several other cross-border projects such as the Tamanthi Hydroelectric Project, the Rhi-Teddim and Rhi-Falam roads and the Kaladan Multi-modal Transport Project were on the anvil.

1988. Three Chin men formed the CNF in 1985 in India. It was formed as an armed independence movement and grew to about 50 members, mostly Chin students who fled to Mizoram during that time. The CNF had no money, arms, or supporters in 1988, but its existence was enough to serve as an excuse for the Myanmar Army to destroy the Chin social establishment.

In 1980, there was only a



Activists from pro-democracy groups of Myanmar hold posters and placards during a demonstration against the state visit of Myanmar's Senior General Than Shwe in New Delhi. — AFP

Senior paramilitary officials said they were ready to assist the Mizoram police in the crackdown. The home ministry team then held a meeting with senior Mizoram government officials the same evening, including the Director-General of Police, and pressed for the need to mount the crackdown without further delay. As a sop to the Mizoram government, the home ministry also agreed to sympathetically consider its long-pending demand for raising an additional India Reserve Battalion for this purpose.

The agreement to mount operations against underground militant outfits operating from each other's territory was struck last October, when a memorandum of understand-

After the agreement, the Indian Army closed the international border in Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. Moving on a reciprocal line, the Union home ministry recently convened two high-level meetings — one in New Delhi and the other in Aizawl — to fine-tune its strategy for a crackdown on the Myanmar rebels. The only hitch for the Indian government appeared to be the Mizoram police's reluctance.

The Indian security agencies have identified Camp Victoria of the Chins, inside Indian territory on a barren strip of land near the tri-junction of India, Myanmar and Bangladesh, as the prime target. "The presence of a large group of foreign underground militants is a clear

mere Myanmar Army company in the Chin Hills. By 1995, about 10,000 soldiers were stationed in the Chin Hills because the CNF had grown to about 150 fighters. The Myanmar Army came to the Chin Hills not necessarily to fight the CNF but to instill hatred and fear for the Myanmar people, say specialists.

There is one more rebel group formed from the CNF, the Chin National Confederation. It was floated in 1999 with 200 members. The CNC also claims that it is one of the front-runners fighting for Chin independence. Recently, the founder-president of this organisation, a man named Tialkhala, was ousted by his followers for breaking numerous provisions in the CNC'S constitution; the

government for not having checked Chin movement in the state. Many campaigns have been launched by the state government to evict the Chins but given their strong role in the local economy (businesses, handloom and labour), these campaigns have not been successful. But there has been a growing antipathy towards the Chins, organised by groups such as the influential Young Mizo Association, and accusations alleging their involvement in illicit liquor manufacture, drugs and crime. Some recent campaigns have been triggered by alleged attacks on Mizo girls by the Chins.

(The author is a freelance journalist)

Before truce revival, NSCN cries foul

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JUNE 10

WITH little over a month left before its ceasefire with NSCN (Isak-Muivah) comes up for renewal, the the ceasefire between Centre and the NSCN (I-M) comes up for renewal, the latter has accused the Centre of pursuing a "dual policy". It has also said that "our tolerance and patience should" not be taken for granted.

The statement said that "the Army and paramilitary forces with some of the states armed personnel have been deliberately trying to undermine the ceasefire. These acts were aimed at sabotaging the peace process. The government should immediately control and restraint its" forces. If this is not done, NSCN will not be responsible for any consequences thereafter," the statement said.

Talks between the Naga ministerial delegation and Centre have reached a stalemate after 12 rounds. The Naga's have demanded that integration of Naga inhabited area be considered first but the centre is unable to do so fearing violence in Manipur and Assam who have been consistently opposing integration of Naga inhabited areas.

It is understood that Naga's have proposed a "special federal relation" with India. Sources, however, said that it will be difficult for India to accept the Naga proposal as it could spark similar demands from other people. It is understood that the centre is willing to consider a "special position" for Nagaland.

Government sources, however, were hopeful that ceasefire would be extended. According to them the strongly worded statement is aimed at express-

ing their displeasure at the pace of the talks and also the killing of NSCN (IM) cadre in Assam early this month.

According to them, the Naga delegation has impressed on the central ministerial delegation led by Oscar Fernandez to speed up the process. They further said that NSCN (IN) is unlikely to withdraw from talks as the



Muivah

**After talks
stalemate, outfit
accuses Centre
of 'dual policy',
using force to
sabotage peace
process**

group is as keen as the government to find a solution. Further, they also argued though the NSCN(I-M) still has ability to strike it is unlikely that they would give up the opportunity to usher in peace in the region.

The ceasefire between the NSCN and the Central government was extended last July following talks with the outfit in Chiang-mai, about 500 km from Bangkok, where both sides agreed to carry on talks to find a lasting and peaceful solution.

The centre and the insurgent group first entered into a ceasefire accord in 1997 and have continued with the peace process since then.

Back to stalling

It's time Ulfa grew up 51-8

Delhi did well to respond to Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa's letter seeking an "honourable" settlement and that sovereignty would be discussed. Its reply was sent to facilitator Mamoni Goswami — since Rajkhowa's request was routed through her — and she in turn e-mailed it to self-styled commander-in-chief Paresh Baruah, with whom she maintains contact. But so suspicious was Baruah that he wanted to see the original to verify whether it was "in the same format in which we sent our offer to the Centre". This suggests that the PMO's response was a surprise for Ulfa and it did not expect Delhi to agree to a demand it once rejected outright. But Delhi's offer does in a way put paid to Ulfa leaders' suspicion and oft-repeated allegations of the government not being sincere on the talks. Ulfa is known to act childishly at times, but what is one to make of the reported e-mail its leaders sent to President George Bush seeking US intervention in the "Assam-India" dispute and describing "counter insurgency" operations as a "camouflage for arms oppression"? Curiously, the e-mail was said to have been sent on 11 May after the USA had already put Ulfa on its foreign terrorist list.

Now Ulfa is back to stalling by demanding the release of some top leaders. That this would happen was expected, but Rajkhowa should have included this point in his letter to the Prime Minister. Delhi can concede creating a conducive atmosphere for talks, but there must be a time-frame for dialogue. And what if Ulfa sets fresh conditions for withdrawal of the army? Many moderate leaders were allowed to move about freely after the 1991 ceasefire, but they joined comrades in exile on the pretext of "contacting" them. This "betrayal" should not be lost on the Centre.

10 JUN 2005

THE STATESMAN

Wraps off Uifa hotels in Dhaka

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Shillong, June 3: India today unveiled a list of hotels and other assets allegedly owned by the United Liberation Front of Assam in Bangladesh in a renewed attempt to pressure the government there to act against the outlawed outfit.

The Border Security Force's top official in the Northeast, S.C. Shrivastava, said Uifa leaders based in Bangladesh were managing as

many as seven hotels of "international standard" and some nursing homes, too.

Senior officials in Dhaka were unavailable for comment. A junior home ministry official told **The Telegraph's** Dhaka correspondent that the BSF's claims appeared to be in line with the "usual Bangladesh-bashing some Indian officials like to do".

Shrivastava, who is in charge of the Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and Nagaland frontier, read out from a list that said the militant group

owned Surma International, Hotel Mohammadia and Padma International in Dhaka, Keya International and Hotel Yamuna in Sylhet and Hotel Basundhara and Hotel Raj King in Chittagong.

He said the managers of these hotels were Uifa militants who operated under aliases such as Ahmed, Kamal Hossain, Saidul, Shoal, Humayun and Rubel.

"The hotels and a few nursing homes are under the direct control of Uifa top guns in

Bangladesh or outside."

The BSF revealed details of at least three of Uifa's "active" bank accounts. The accounts were traced to Arab Bazar branch in Sylhet (account number 025401/08), the same branch in Dhaka (account number 5266709/15) and Al-barakah Bank's Paharrai branch in Chittagong (account number 09/229472).

Shrivastava did not rule out the possibility of incarcerating Uifa leader Anup Chetia

—his sentence was supposed to have ended on February 25 but he remains in jail—being a key man in the outfit's business ventures. He was arrested on December 21, 1997.

India has been seeking, unsuccessfully, for years to have him extradited, as it has been trying—again tasting repeated failures—to persuade Dhaka to crack down on Northeast militants who have allegedly taken shelter in Bangladesh.

Although today's allegations were levelled by a BSF of-

ficial in the region, intelligence sources in Delhi said it was highly improbable that the government had not been kept informed.

The disclosures come about 10 days after Bangladesh Rifles ostensibly began an operation to flush out militants on May 24.

"We were informed by them about the offensive; it was very nice of them to have done that. But of what use is an offensive like that if a major outfit (Uifa) is left out?" Shrivastava asked.

At least five militants of the National Liberation Front of Tripura were reported killed in an encounter with the forces on May 27. Sources said the counter-insurgency offensive ended on May 30.

Shrivastava said Uifa's businesses in Bangladesh would have been affected had the outfit been targeted in the operation.

"If it was a uniform exercise, these Uifa-managed hotels and nursing homes should have been closed along with their bank accounts."

Centre rejects ULFA plea for leaders' release

By Mahendra Ved/TNN

New Delhi: The Union government on Tuesday dismissed the demand made by ULFA that 10 of its office-bearers be released to facilitate a dialogue. Sources in the government said the demand was "a usual pressure tactic" resorted to by militant bodies everywhere to secure the release of their people.

What is more, half of these leaders are not even in the custody of India and two of them are believed to be missing in action. "To ask the government to release them is playing out a charade," a senior official requesting anonymity told TOI. A letter signed by national security adviser M K Narayanan was sent by the Union home ministry last week, expressing willingness to hold talks with anyone ready to shun violence. Assamese litterateur Indira Goswami, who is the unofficial interlocutor between the government and ULFA, said, "They have asked that office-bearers be released."

ULFA's central committee has 10 members, of which the top honchos - Arabinda Rajkhowa, Paresh Baruah, Shasha Choudhury and Anup Chetia - are in Bangladesh. They live in Dhaka and operate camps in districts bordering Assam. For the last few years, Rajkhowa, who is the political head, and Baruah, who is the 'commander-in-chief' of the militant wing, have kept in touch with the media in Guwahati.

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

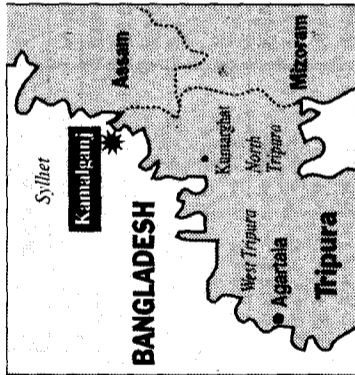
Bangladesh cracks down on NE rebels

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP
GUWAHATI, MAY 31

DHAKA has finally launched a drive to cut off the arms supply links of North-East insurgent groups with bases inside Bangladesh, in move being viewed as a run-up to the ensuing SAARC meet there.

India and Bangladesh are also holding a foreign secretary-level meeting in New Delhi on June 20-21. The operation also gives a twist to Bangladesh's stand that there are no Indian militant groups operating in the country. Dhaka has all along denied India's claim that rebel groups from the North-East had over 150 hideouts and camps there. Indian security sources say top rebel leaders like ULFA chairman Arabind Rajkhowa and commander-in-chief Pares

Barua also operate from there. The crackdown, jointly launched by the Rapid Action Battalion and Bangladesh Rifles, along a 200-km stretch adjoining Tripura and Assam,



IE Map/B.K. Sharma

has already led to the arrest of eight rebels — six Tripuris and two Manipuris. Six others, who were later identified as members of a Tripura insur-

gent group, were killed on Friday in Kamalganj, sources said. Bangladesh officials said the operation was launched only against "miscreants."

"It's a crackdown on suspected gunmen, who supply illegal arms and ammunition to local hoodlums," the Dhaka-based *Daily Star* quoted Lt Col Gulzaruddin Ahmed, director of RAB intelligence, who was with the Kamalganj raiding force, yesterday. He, however, also said that the six persons killed on Friday night were "unknown" to Bangladesh law enforcement agencies.

The Dhaka newspaper also quoted RAB sources and said the crackdown led to seizure of six grenades, one sub-machine gun, two magazines, 105 bullets, and communication equipment from the insurgent hideout on a hilltop surrounded by forests in Kamalganj.

ULFA wants leaders' release

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
GUWAHATI, MAY 31

ULFA has asked for the release of its top leaders so that it can discuss the Centre's invitation — forwarded by Assamese writer Indira Goswami four days ago — to hold talks on its core demands.

ULFA commander-in-chief Pares Barua, who called up some newspapers in Guwahati last night, said while the group had received a copy of the PMO letter through e-mail from Indira Goswami, he would have to discuss the contents of the letter with other members of the outfit's Central Committee in order to respond to it. "We will have to place the letter in our Central Committee. But since several

top members are in captivity, we must first demand release of these members in order to hold a discussion," *The Assam Tribune* quoted Barua as saying. Barua, the newspaper said, has demanded the release of general secretary Anup Chetia, vice-chairman Pradip Gogoi, central publicity secretary Mithinga Daimari, advisor and ideologue Bhimkanta Buragohain and culture secretary Pranati Deka, among others. Chetia has been languishing in a prison in Dhaka since 1997.

Meanwhile, Assam CM Tarun Gogoi today said he was not averse to the idea of freeing ULFA leaders to facilitate peace talks. "I think the ULFA has softened its original stand and withdrawn most of its pre-conditions," Gogoi said.

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5/5/8
3/1/5

Now or never

9-11/8
Golan

Ulfa sincerity on test

The next move belongs to the Ulfa leadership, now that Delhi is ready to discuss the "core issue" of sovereignty. This was what Jnanpith award-winner Mamoni Raison Goswami was hoping for since she took responsibility to bring the two sides to the negotiating table. It goes to her credit that despite Delhi's earlier rejection of the demand, she persisted. Delhi has met Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa's demand that it prove its sincerity by sending a formal invitation on an official letterhead, complete with seal and signature. The difference being that the memo was signed by national security advisor MK Narayanan and not the Prime Minister, to whom Rajkhowa sent a formal letter through Goswami in February. Delhi is not known to have shown such courtesy to any banned militant organisation and Ulfa would be childish to reject the invitation for so trifling a reason. Ulfa's self-styled commander-in-chief, Paresh Baruah, is reportedly seeking clarification on abjuring violence before talks. If this was not stipulated in the invitation, the outfit should know better that no peace talks are possible in an atmosphere of violence. The Centre has made it clear that it is prepared to talk to any group that eschews violence. No precondition has been set for surrender of arms.

The Ulfa leadership is on record as having said that if the Centre accepts its demand for "sovereignty" discussions, it will be ready within days and would not insist on a third country venue. Now if it stalls by raising other issues, it will admit its incapacity to act independently of its foreign agents and put its sincerity on test. Nor can it afford to ignore the sentiments of those pushing for peace. It is now or never.

3 1 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

NEC secretary quits office

Sanjoy Hazarika
in New Delhi

May 29. — Mr Kamal Taori, the top bureaucrat in the North Eastern Council, the regional planning and development agency for the underdeveloped areas bordering four countries, is leaving his office less than a year after his appointment.

Mr Taori, an IAS officer of the 1968 batch, has been on leave for some time and has been seeking an appointment in a Central ministry dealing with rural issues and governance, a top official close to him said.

The council is comprised of eight chief ministers and Governors of the North-east as well as three other members.

Appointed amid much fanfare last summer after the UPA government came to power under Dr Manmohan Singh, Mr Taori took over as secretary of the NEC, which had been headless for over two years, with a joint secretary level officer holding the charge as secretary.

He inherited an institution with a patchy record of development and planning

since its creation in 1972 and leaves at a time when it is preparing a "Vision 2020" document and barely days after it moved into its new Rs 20 crore headquarters in Shillong. The "vision document" is purportedly aimed at charting what the minister for the Development of the North Eastern Region, Mr PR Kyndiah, calls a "roadmap" for the region's economic growth.

This of course begs the question about many maps, reports, consultancies and roads — both literal and metaphorical — which have been developed over the past 33 years and whether those are being incorporated or jettisoned. The appropriate development model for the region has not yet been found and three decades down the road seems rather late to find it — though one wishes the campaign well.

Mr Taori's career graph pointed him out as an innovative thinker with fresh concepts aimed at developing participative planning and grassroots work (seen in a project he supported in Mizoram under the NEC of documenting crimeless villages) and also as a man in a

hurry, with little patience for sustained focus and the detailed picture.

He had worked extensively in the Khadi and Village Industries Corporation and also in the Planning Commission and wrote extensively on his views on planning. But his unhappiness in his new post was obvious as far back as September last year, when he spoke of internal friction in the organisation and the difficulties in getting it into shape. Others in the organisation said that he had created more confusion there.

Although he is officially said to be seeking a transfer on personal grounds — citing family and other reasons (his wife teaches at Wardha in Maharashtra) — Mr Taori is also said to be increasingly unhappy about his diminishing role after this year's restructuring of the NEC which brought in two retired bureaucrats with extensive experience of the region into the council, Mr PP Shrivastav and Dr IK Barthakur.

Mr BM Yuganthar, member of the Planning Commission handling the North-east, is also a council member.

29 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

CONGRESS GOVT IN ASSAM INITIATES MOVE TO UPDATE NATIONAL CITIZENS' REGISTER, IDENTIFY ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS IN STATE

Gogoi silent on PMO letter to Ulfa

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, May 28. — Stung by twin issues confronting the state, Assam chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi made cautious moves — first by not commenting upon the PMO's letter to the Ulfa calling it for negotiation and second — by initiating a process of updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC), 1951 to 25 March, 1971 as per Assam Accord.

Mr Gogoi seems to be careful enough while dealing with the insurgency issue as he chose to maintain studied silence over the

letter from the National Security Advisor, Mr Mr MK Narayanan that was sent yesterday through Delhi-based Assamese litterateur Dr Mamoni Raisom Goswami.

The chief minister refrained from making any comment on the development stating that he had only read about it in the morning newspapers and yet to receive any official communication in this regard. "Let's hope for the best," is what Mr Gogoi could say at the most. Mr Gogoi even parried questions on security measures taken to protect ruling Congress leaders in the state in the wake of Ulfa gunning down a party man

Amrit Dutta in Jorhat on Thursday. "This is an internal matter of the party. Why should I divulge security arrangements for our party man?" Mr Gogoi shot back.

Dr Goswami, who has been on a mission to broker peace in Assam, told over phone from New Delhi that the letter was immediately emailed to the Ulfa chairman Mr Arabinda Rajkhowa. Declining to divulge the content of the letter, she said that the PMO had given the best possible officers while inviting Ulfa for talks and "the ball is now in the court of those boys (Ulfa)".

It is the second letter from the

PMO to the Ulfa in response to the outfit's February letter expressing its willingness for talks on the issue of sovereignty. The first letter was rejected by the Ulfa stating that it was not addressing to the 'core issue'.

The chief minister was, however, thrilled enough to inform the media about his government's efforts in initiating a process for updating the National Register of Citizens in tune with the decisions taken in the Prime Minister level tripartite discussion on Assam Accord implementation.

Mr Gogoi said that the state home and political department would take care of the NRC updating and a

director had been appointed to head the newly set up wing of the NRC. A two-year time frame has been fixed for completion of the process.

The NRC will be updated on the basis of the NRC of 1951. However, modalities are yet to be fixed in case of certain areas and districts of the state where NRC of 1951 is not available. The modalities will be finalised after discussions with All Assam Students Union, a signatory to the Assam Accord, 1985. It is expected that for those area the earliest available voters list will be basis for updating the NRC.

For speedy disposal of cases relat-

ed to detection and deportation of illegal immigrants, the government has decided to set up 14 more IMDT tribunals in addition to the existing 16. Now, all the tribunals will be chaired by a single judge. However, in view of shortage of judges to man all the 30 tribunals, the government will ask for central fund to appoint more judges.

Meanwhile, Mr Gogoi after making substantial increase in his revenue collections from taxes gave a major bonanza to the rural farming community by completely waiving of the revenue tax for the farmers with land holdings of less than 2.64 acres.

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তহবিল ভেঙে সাড়ে নয় শতাংশ সুদই পি এফ

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২৮ মে: লড়াই ফিরে এল বুমেরাং হয়ে।

গত আর্থিক বছরের জন্য প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের সুদের হার সাড়ে নয় শতাংশই ঘোষিত হল। পাঁচ ঘণ্টা ধরে ট্রাস্টি বোর্ডের বৈঠকের পরে শ্রমমন্ত্রী চন্দ্রশেখর রাও আজ এ কথা ঘোষণা করেছেন। কিন্তু যে বামপন্থীরা 'লড়াই' করে এই দাবি আদায় করলেন, তাঁদের কাছে পুরো বিষয়টাই বুমেরাং হয়ে ফিরে এসেছে। কারণ, ঘাটতি মেটানো হচ্ছে অর্থ মন্ত্রকের বদান্যতায় নয়, প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডেরই এমন একটি তহবিল ভেঙে, যা দুঃস্থ শ্রমিকদের কাজে লাগে।

গত বছরের জন্য এই সাড়ে নয় শতাংশ সুদ দিতে গিয়ে ৭১৬ কোটি টাকা ঘাটতি দেখা দিয়েছিল। বিস্তারিত অঙ্ক কষার পর আন্তর্জাতিক সংস্থা 'মার্সার'-এর পরামর্শে ট্রাস্টি বোর্ড ঠিক করেছে, ওই ঘাটতি পূরণ করা হবে প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের স্পেশাল রিজার্ভ ফান্ড ভেঙে। এই তহবিলে বাজেয়াপ্ত হওয়া ৯৪১ কোটি টাকা বহু দশক ধরে জমা পড়ছে এবং আসলের চেয়ে প্রায় দ্বিগুণ সুদ সেখানে জমা হয়েছে। ওই ঘাটতি মেটানোর পরে পড়ে থাকবে মাত্র ২২৫ কোটি টাকা।

কিন্তু এই সঞ্চিত তহবিল যে সুদ দেওয়ার প্রয়োজনে ব্যবহার করা অনুচিত, সেটা তো স্বাভাবিক বুদ্ধি। কারণ, যে সমস্ত সংস্থা বন্ধ হয়ে গিয়েছে এবং কর্মচারীদের টাকা জমা পড়ছে না, সেখানকার কর্মীদের প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের টাকা এই তহবিল থেকেই অনেক সময়ে মেটানো হয়। এই সিদ্ধান্তে অসন্তোষ জানিয়েছেন সিটুর ডব্লু আর বরদারাজন এবং এইটাকের ডি এন সচদেব।

এ ভাবে ঘাটতি মেটানোর সিদ্ধান্তে বামদের অসন্তোষ খুবই স্বাভাবিক। কারণ, আরও একটি মৌলিক বিষয় আজকের সিদ্ধান্তের মধ্যে দিয়ে স্পষ্ট হয়ে গেল। তা হল এই যে এর পর (অর্থাৎ চলতি বছর) থেকে আর সাড়ে আট শতাংশের বেশি সুদ দেওয়ার পথ আর রইল না। কারণ, স্পেশাল রিজার্ভ ফান্ডে যে ২২৫ কোটি টাকা পড়ে থাকবে, তা ভর্তুকি দিয়ে বেশি হারে সুদ দেওয়ার পক্ষে যথেষ্ট নয়।

ফলে এখন শেষ চেষ্টা হিসাবে বামদের দাবিতে সায় দিয়ে ট্রাস্টি

বোর্ড ঠিক করেছে, যেখানে ফান্ডের ৬৫ শতাংশ টাকা থাকে সেই স্পেশাল ডিপজিটারি স্কিমে সুদের হার আট শতাংশ থেকে বাড়ানোর দাবিতে তাঁরা অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরম ও প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহের দ্বারস্থ হবেন। চিদম্বরম কিন্তু এ ভাবে পিছনের দরজা দিয়ে প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের সুদে ভর্তুকি ফিরিয়ে আনার চেষ্টা বার বারই বাতিল করে দিয়েছেন।

গত আর্থিক বছরে (২০০৪-০৫) প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের আয় অনুযায়ী সুদ কস্টেস্টে সাড়ে আট শতাংশই দেওয়া সম্ভব ছিল। এক সময়ে ট্রাস্টি বোর্ড অন্তর্বর্তী হার ঘোষণাও করেছিল সাড়ে আট শতাংশ। সে সময় শ্রম মন্ত্রক থেকে এ কথাও বলা হয়েছিল যে সাড়ে নয় শতাংশ সুদ দিতে হলে ৯২৭ কোটি টাকার ঘাটতি হবে। কিন্তু পরে হিসাব পরীক্ষা করে দেখা যায় ওই পরিমাণ হবে ৭১৬ কোটি টাকা।

বামপন্থীরা কিন্তু এই দাবিতে অনড় ছিলেন যে সুদ সাড়ে নয় শতাংশই দিতে হবে। তাঁরা চাইছিলেন, যতটা ঘাটতি হবে তার দায় বহন করুক অর্থ মন্ত্রক। তাঁদের চাপে সরকারি ভাবেও সাড়ে নয় শতাংশ সুদ দেওয়ার প্রতিশ্রুতি ঘোষণা করা হয়।

কিন্তু চিদম্বরম ভর্তুকি দিতে অস্বীকার করে জানিয়ে দেন, প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ড কর্তৃপক্ষের পক্ষেই ঘাটতি প্রায় সবটা মেটানো সম্ভব বলে তিনি মনে করেন। এর পর আন্তর্জাতিক সংস্থাকে দিয়ে তহবিল পরীক্ষা করে দেখে শ্রম মন্ত্রক। তাঁদের পরামর্শেই যে আপৎকালীন তহবিল ভাঙা হল তা আজ চন্দ্রশেখর রাও জানান।

ফলে বামদের দাবি মানা হল ঠিকই, কিন্তু এমন ভাবে, যা বামপন্থীদের দুঃস্থ। কারণ, দুঃস্থ শ্রমিকদের জন্য অনিশ্চয়তা তৈরি করার জন্য ভবিষ্যতে তাঁদের দোষ দেওয়ার পথই তৈরি করল সরকার।

২০০৩-০৪ সালের জন্য তৎকালীন শ্রমমন্ত্রী সাহেব সিংহ বর্মাও আধ শতাংশ বাড়তি সুদ দেওয়ার জন্য এই আপৎকালীন তহবিল ব্যবহার করেছিলেন। সে সময় প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের পক্ষে নয় শতাংশ সুদ দেওয়া সম্ভব ছিল। কিন্তু নির্বাচনের প্রাক্কালে আরও আধ শতাংশ বোনাস হিসাবে ঘোষণা করেন মন্ত্রী।

29 MAY 2005

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

No welcome for them in Assam

The influx of illegal Bangladeshi migrants has again taken centre stage.

Sushanta Talukdar

THE ISSUE of the influx of "illegal" Bangladeshi migrants into Assam is back in focus. Recently, a campaign for an economic boycott of the migrants by a youth organisation triggered an exodus of religious minority people from Dibrugarh town.

With less than a year left for the State Assembly elections, the various political parties have also entered the scene. The ruling Congress and the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party are engaged in a tug-of-war. The religious minorities are considered a traditional vote bank of the Congress, and the BJP has been trying to woo Hindu voters saying the "illegal" migrants should be driven out.

The Congress has dubbed the campaign by the Chiring Chapori Yuva Mancha for an economic boycott of illegal Bangladeshi migrants a game plan of the BJP and the RSS. However, the fact that the Congress was initially silent and rushed in only after reports of exodus of migrant workers belonging to the religious minority community from Dibrugarh town has raised questions.

The Mancha distributed leaflets urging the public not to employ illegal Bangladeshi migrants, not to travel in vehicles plied by them, not to have any business transaction with them, and not to provide shelter or rented accommodation. A simultaneous SMS campaign was also run. Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi is on record that those who have left Dibrugarh were not Bangladeshis but Indian citizens who had gone there in search of a livelihood. He, however, said his Government was committed to detecting and deporting illegal migrants from Assam.

The BJP, on the other hand, has backed the Mancha campaign and accused the Congress of trying to protect "illegal" Bangladeshi migrants. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal have set June 7 as the deadline for illegal migrants to quit Assam.

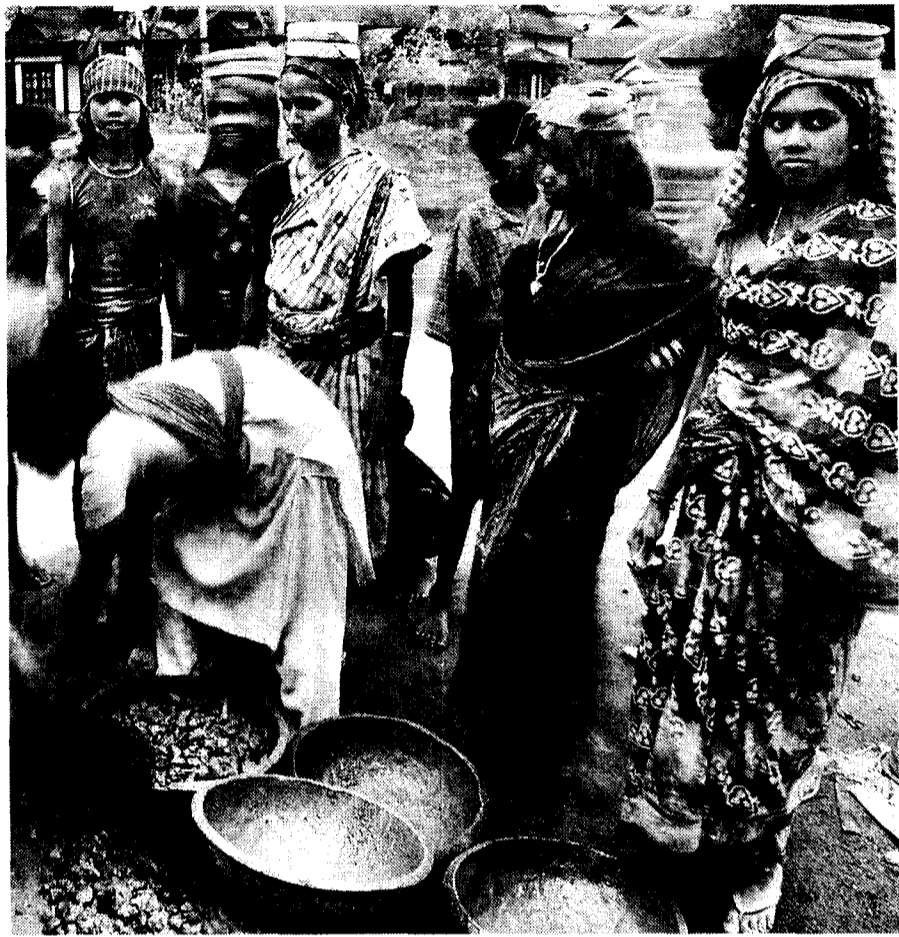
The Asom Gana Parishad reacted cautiously. It expressed reservations about anyone taking the law into their own hands but blamed the Congress Government for the exodus of genuine Indian citizens belonging to religious minorities from Dibrugarh. This guarded response is being seen as part of the

AGP plan to make inroads among the minorities in a traditional Congress stronghold.

Meanwhile, other non-Congress and non-BJP parties have come together at the initiative of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)'s State unit. They have expressed concern over the harassment of the religious minorities and the attempts to revive the anti-foreigners' agitation in Assam under the garb of a campaign against illegal Bangladeshi migrants. The parties include the Nationalist Congress Party, the Republican Socialist Party, the United Minorities Front (UMF), the Janata Dal (Secular), the CPI (ML), the Samajwadi Party, and the SUCI. The AGP and the CPI kept out of this platform, whose constituents may not matter much in terms of individual electoral strength but are a force combined. Indications are the State is likely to witness a realignment of forces before the Assembly elections due in May 2006. In a way, the current agitation is a continuation of the six-year anti-foreigners' agitation spearheaded by the All-Assam Students' Union in the early 1980s. That agitation ended with the signing of the Assam Accord by the AASU with the Centre and the State Government in 1985. But the issue of detection and deportation of illegal migrants remained unsolved. Infiltration continued unabated through the porous Indo-Bangladesh border even 20 years after the signing of the accord.

Identification and deportation of illegal migrants is the task of the Central and State Governments. The present economic boycott call can result in discrimination against those who have every right to be in the State.

There is no way illegal migrants can be distinguished based on physical appearance from those who entered Assam prior to March 25, 1971 (the cut off date in the Assam Accord). There has also been intra-State migration of pre-1971 settlers in search of livelihood due to acute agro crisis and loss of their habitats as well as cultivable land (large sandbars in the heart of the Brahmaputra known as Chars) caused by annual floods and erosion. This makes it difficult for local people to distinguish a genuine Indian citizen from an illegal migrant. In such a situation there is every possibility of pre-1971 immigrant settlers being wrongly suspected



UNWELCOME: Bangladeshi migrant labourers on the streets of Guwahati, Assam's capital. - PHOTO: AFP

of being an illegal migrants when the locals belonging to the majority Assamese speaking population decide to respond to an appeal for an economic boycott of illegal migrants, out of their genuine fear of being marginalised. A tripartite meeting among the AASU, the Centre and the Assam Government on May 5 this year agreed on certain-time bound steps. These include updating the National Register of Citizens by including the names of all those who entered the State before the cut-off date of

March 25, 1971 and issuing photo identity cards. All political parties and groups in the State have backed this decision.

The UMF, a political grouping of religious minorities, which was a staunch opponent of the Assam Accord, has also supported the move to update the NRC and issue photo identity cards. The fact that a time frame of two years has been fixed for updating the NRC is most likely to dominate Assam's political scenario till the State actually gets an updated register.

28 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

SATURDAY, MAY 28, 2005

A positive turn in Assam



9. NDFB earlier 8/25 *10 2015*

The tripartite ceasefire agreement among the Centre, the Assam Government, and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland is one more incremental step towards the settlement of an issue that has added to the unrest and violence in the State and more generally in the North-East. The truce agreement, signed on May 25, was the logical follow-up on the Bodo group's unilateral ceasefire in October 2004. That was the first positive signal to emerge from the group, which has carried out a violent campaign for an independent Bodoland for more than a decade. Indeed the NDFB is widely held responsible for two bomb attacks in Nagaland that killed 24 people on Gandhi Jayanti last year, days before it declared a ceasefire. The group evidently intended the attacks as a show of strength after the Bhutan Government took military action to close down its camps, along with the bases of the other North-East militant outfits, in 2003. However, the NDFB also seems to have realised that conducting a sustained campaign for its goal of an independent Bodoland would be difficult with a depleted leadership. The arrest of Bijoy Boro, the NDFB's "deputy commander-in-chief" in Bangkok in July 2004, capped a series of surrenders and arrests of top leaders of the group since 2002. After the Nagaland blasts, NDFB chairman Ranjan Daimary eagerly grasped Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi's offer of talks. He declared a six-month unilateral truce, which led to the recent ceasefire agreement. *NDFB*

Hopefully, talks between the Government and one of the most intransigent militant groups in the North-East will follow soon. The negotiations will not be easy. The NDFB has not said it is prepared to give up its demand for a sovereign state of Bodoland carved out of areas north of the Brahmaputra, where most of the 1.5 million Bodo people live. The other prickly issue is the Bodo Territorial Council set up in 2003 after an agreement between the Centre and the Bodo Liberation Tigers, arch rivals of the NDFB. The BTC is an autonomous regional council designed to fulfil the economic, linguistic, and educational aspirations of the Bodos within Assam. The NDFB opposes it fiercely. Elections to the 40-seat Council were held for the first time on May 13 with the Bodo People's Progressive Front, a party built out of the now disbanded BLT, and the All Bodo Students' Union as the main contestants. But the results have been withheld indefinitely on account of widespread irregularities. This means a delay in the disbursement of the annual Central grant of Rs.100 crore to the Council for five years, from the time elected members take charge of it. There may be dismay over this setback and at the "infighting" among the Bodos that the election set off, but there is no denying the large-scale participation in it. A peace process involving the NDFB will need to take this into account and to ensure that all sections of Bodos, including the erstwhile BLT, get on board. Only this can guarantee a lasting settlement to the Bodo question, and bring to an end at least one of Assam's many troubles.

28 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

Ulfa blasts after Delhi offer

OUR BUREAU

Guwahati/Dibrugarh, May 27: Delhi agreed to "discuss" the banned Ulfa's core demand, sovereignty, on a night when activists of the militant group were out destroying power transformers and a bridge that links Assam and parts of Arunachal Pradesh.

Writer Mamoni Raisom Goswami, who is mediating between Delhi and the outfit, today announced that the long-awaited reply to Ulfa's conditions for a dialogue was delivered to her last night.

That was a few hours before three explosions rocked Tinsukia district of Upper Assam, breaking a vital communication link, com-

pletely destroying a transformer and partially damaging another.

Goswami said she forwarded the letter from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), which is addressed to Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa, with a covering note asking the militant group to take it "seriously".

"National security adviser M.K. Narayanan has written the letter and I am satisfied with its contents. It addresses the issue that has been the stumbling block in the peace process till now," she said.

Ulfa had ignored the previous letter from the PMO on the ground that it did not categorically mention sovereignty.

The Delhi-based writer

and teacher said she was hopeful of a breakthrough this time. "I have informed them (the Ulfa leaders) that the PMO is willing to clarify any doubts they may have about the letter."

Delhi's climbdown and Goswami's positive outlook presented a stark contrast to the situation on the ground.

Ulfa militants targeted the two transformers of the Assam State Electricity Board at Bordirak and Harudirak villages, about 15 km from Kakopathar police station, sometime after midnight.

A third explosion occurred about 12 km from the same police station, destroying a major portion of an iron bridge over Maithong river.

The incident snapped Assam's road links with Lohit district and most parts of eastern Arunachal Pradesh.

A concrete bridge is being constructed alongside the old one.

A source said the saboteurs overpowered the seven guards deployed in the area and fixed explosives under the bridge.

"They did not harm the guards and set them free minutes before the blast occurred around 1.50 am."

A 34-member Ulfa team led by Jiten Dutta, the "deputy operations commander" of the outfit's crack 28 Battalion, and a hitman identified as Joon Bhuyan are suspected to be behind the orgy of violence.

28 MAY 2005

THE TELEGRAPH

NDFB SIGNS CEASEFIRE PACT WITH CENTRE

Truce after 20 years

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI, May 25. — Putting an end to 20 years of insurgency, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) has signed a ceasefire agreement with the Centre and the Assam government, it was announced today. A joint monitoring group (JMG) will be formed to oversee the agreement's implementation.

The JMG will be chaired by the Union home ministry's joint-secretary in-charge of North-east, Mr Rajeev Aggarwal, and will comprise representatives from the Centre, Assam government and the NDFB.

After his meeting with the Bodo leaders, Union home minister Mr Shivraj Patil said the accord would help strengthen the peace process in Assam and other North-east states.

According to the agreement — which was signed by the Union home ministry's special secretary, Mr Anil Chowdhry, Assam's home secretary, Mr BK Gohain, and the NDFB's general secretary, Mr Gobinda Basumatary — the NDFB will stay in designated camps and lists of its cadres and weapons will be given to the Assam Police.

Responding to a peace offer by the Assam chief minister, Mr Tarun Gogoi, the NDFB declared a unilateral ceasefire on 15 October. It renewed the ceasefire on 15 April this year. It later sent feelers to the Centre for talks.

The NDFB will maintain peace during the one year beginning 1 June, 2005 and will not carry out any hostile or violent activities against security forces or civilians. The security forces will, in turn, not carry out any operations against the NDFB. The NDFB cadres will not carry



Mr Shivraj Patil with NDFB leaders after signing the accord. — PTI

arms or move in uniforms in this period, and will not give assistance to any other militant group.

Assam chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi said that while signing the ceasefire accord with the NDFB, his government had made it "very clear" that there would be no negotiation on its demand for a separate country. The outfit has been demanding a separate state for the Bodos.

The Congress and the Opposition in Assam have lauded the pact. An Assam Pradesh Congress Committee spokesman said: "We welcome this truce and hope that it marks the end of violence and the dawn of peace and prosperity in the Bodo-dominated areas in the state."

The Asom Gana Parishad president, Mr Brindaban Goswami, said that the pact raised hopes for the return of peace in Assam and that it would go a long way towards fulfilling the aspirations of the Bodo masses. "The accord is a good sign and augurs well for Assam," a state BJP spokesman said.

In the past 20 years, over 1,000 people, including NDFB activists and security force personnel, have been killed.

A socio-political matter was treated as a security-related one by New Delhi, a huge mistake for which we are repenting today, writes JK DUTT. Maximum autonomy must be accorded to Nagaland and efforts ought to be made to remove the feeling of alienation

The general secretary of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah), Thuingaleng Muivah, gave a thought-provoking interview to the *BBC* recently on the Naga issue, his main point being the Nagas were in no way going to accept the jurisdiction of the Indian government legally, physically or politically in the course of resolving the Naga problem that has prevailed since 1947.

Both the senior leaders of this faction — Isak Chisi Swu and Mr Muivah — are in India for the second time in as many years for peace talks with the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The ongoing talks that began with the previous government and have been creditably steered to-date by New Delhi's man on the spot, K Padmanabhaiah, is of enduring significance to the North-east because every insurgent group operating in that region is keenly watching the negotiations' progress.

If it ends in success then there is ample hope that the other insurgent groups will also decide to settle their disputes with the government in a peaceful manner.

This will pave the way for wholesale negation of insurgency in India's most vital geo-political cum geo-economic segment. But if talks with the NSCN (I-M) fail, the consequences are too disturbing to think of. The only lodestar for these talks is the fact that New Delhi has successfully resolved the long-drawn conflict with the Bodo Liberation Tigers. So there is good enough reason for an analogy in the same vein.

A brief insight into the Naga issue would be educative. The problem originated during the British days when the fiercely proud and independent-minded Nagas simply refused to be cowed down by India's foreign rulers.

Historians recount that the British could lord over every other warrior tribe of India of the time barring two, the Pathans of the north-west and the Nagas of the north-east.

A Naga delegation also met the Simon Commission circa 1929 and an understanding was arrived at by which the British left the Nagas alone. The real problem cropped up at the time of India's independence. The charismatic Naga leader and a founder member of the Naga National Council, AZ Phizo, fell out with Jawaharlal Nehru solely because of the wrong handling of the issue by New Delhi's nascent ruling party.

Heal the Nagas



Naga youth dressed in their traditional costumes. New Delhi must provide ample scope for employment. — Eastern Projections

Phizo demanded sovereign status for his fellow countrymen, something that Nehru refused to entertain. Inexplicably, New Delhi decided to apply military force on Phizo in place of cool-headed diplomacy. Compounding the political felony, the government erred in dispatching the Indian Army to "quell" the Nagas (the Army is still there!) and followed up this unwise step by unleashing the abhorrent Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 on them.

A socio-political matter was treated as a security-related one by New Delhi, a huge mistake for which we are repenting today. Phizo moved off to England to carry on his struggle and insurgency gradually spread all over the north-east.

The state of Nagaland as we know it was formed on 1 December, 1963 with Kohima as its capital. The conflict with the government, however, continued unabated.

An accord was signed at Shillong in 1975, largely due to the untiring efforts of Jaiprakash Narain but this accord was short-lived. 1980 saw the breaking away from the Naga National Council of an influential group calling itself the National

Socialist Council of Nagaland, only to be banned by the government.

Eight years on, the NSCN split, forming the I-M and the Khaplang factions. The latter is led by SS Khaplang. This made no difference to the non-stop onslaught against the government with the Nagas procuring modern weapons to further vitalise their guerrilla tactics.

Ultimately, genuine efforts made by successive Prime Ministers, including clandestine meetings abroad, brought about an officially declared ceasefire and the corresponding lifting of the ban on the NSCN.

In the meantime, several changes had taken place within the Naga set-up. Phizo expired and his place was taken by his daughter Adinno Phizo in London who stuck to the sovereignty demand.

The NSCN (I-M) and the NSCN (K) fell out on ideological differences. Other splinter organisations like the Naga Ho Ho and the church, too, joined in. Not to miss an opportunity, political fuelling of the cauldron in the north-east by Bangladesh, Pakistan and Myanmar reached an all-time high.

The NSCN (I-M) modified its

original demand for independence with something more sinister.

A new term, Nagalim, was coined and this became the new objective. Nagalim translates to "a greater Nagaland", which in turn enunciates an extended Nagaland state inclusive of those districts from the adjacent states where Nagas have been residing for generations.

Specifically, these comprised the districts of Changlang in Arunachal Pradesh, Karbi Anglong in Assam, and four districts of Manipur — Senapati, Ukhrul, Tamenglong and Chandel. The NSCN (I-M) wanted the ongoing ceasefire, as applicable to Nagaland *per se*, to be equally applicable to all these districts.

The government in its foolhardiness and as a *suo motu* move, decided to experiment with the ceasefire extension in Manipur as a trial measure in June, 2001.

The outcome was a violent protest in Imphal, the ferocity of which forced the Centre not only to rescind its thoughtless order of ceasefire extension but also impose President's rule in Manipur.

Elections have been held but the wound and suspicion are yet to heal. This type of casuistry shows gover-

nance in a rank bad light.

It is also debatable whether the concept of Nagalim has the blanket approval of the other Naga factions. Some questions have been raised on the NSCN (I-M)'s *locus standi* to speak on behalf of all the Nagas. The I-M claims to be the largest of the Naga groups and avows that it does have the unqualified backing of all for Nagalim.

An assessment shows that the other Naga groups have resorted to fence-sitting, albeit Adinno Phizo's occasional thrusts and parries for her Naga kingdom from her British hideout. She also conducts a running battle with Mr Swu and Mr Muivah, while the Khaplang faction waits and watches.

The point is, what happens now? The Prime Minister has an arduous task and must be hard put to find an acceptable solution to the I-M's publicised manifesto.

Going along with the Nagalim herring will obviously be disastrous as Manipur has explicitly demonstrated. So it would be prudent to reflect on the method that the British gainfully used on the Nagas — leave them alone under some terms of reference. This will need very tactful handling.

Additionally, New Delhi has to build a good infrastructure for Nagaland's all-round development that will provide adequate employment scope to the Naga youth.

Arranging the interaction of Nagas with residents of other states on a "meet-and-greet" basis will be another appropriate step in closing ranks.

The Army and the unholy Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act must be withdrawn from all Naga areas. Maximum autonomy must be accorded to Nagaland under an effective publicity campaign.

The most crucial aspect of it all is to overtly undo the feeling of alienation that the Nagas have been harbouring since 1947. The incalculable hurt to their psyche as inflicted first by Nehru and maintained by his successors must be ameliorated. We need to appreciate that the Nagas are an immense asset to our nation and we have to enfold this intrepid race into our mainstream without fear or rancour.

Hopefully saner gumption will prevail during the talks, giving way to a movement where India's oldest insurgent mode will reform itself into an abode of peace and prosperity.

(The author is Lieutenant-Colonel (ret'd), Indian Army.)

Assam alert over bandh call by pro-migrants

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP
GUWAHATI, MAY 23

THE Assam government today sounded a high alert throughout the state, apprehending trouble in view of some pro-migrant groups calling a bandh tomorrow to protest the ouster of suspected Bangladeshi migrants from Upper Assam districts in the past two weeks.

Leading the bandh call is the All Assam Minorities Students' Union (AAMSU) that has alleged that while some groups, including the BJP, were

scaring away people belonging to minority communities in the name of ousting Bangladeshi migrants, the Congress government had remained a silent spectator.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi today reiterated that all those who had left the Upper Assam districts following a campaign launched by an NGO, and allegedly backed by the BJP and AASU, were not Bangladeshi migrants but "genuine" Indian citizens.

Gogoi has already directed the authorities in every district to take stern steps to prevent groups from organising meetings and running campaigns to

Gogoi has already directed district authorities to take

prevent groups from running campaigns to oust anybody in the name of pushing out suspected Bangladeshi migrants

Bangladeshi migrants

With the Congress government re-

fusing to accept that infiltration by Bangladeshi migrants was a serious issue, district authorities have already turned down requests seeking permission to hold anti-migrant rallies in Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar and Golaghat over the past two days.

Over 2,000 persons had left the Upper Assam districts of Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Golaghat and Jorhat in the past two weeks after a local NGO asked people not to engage suspected Bangladeshi migrants in any kind of employment.

The government, however, has confirmed that not a single FIR has been

lodged so far which alleges harassment of any kind.

Meanwhile, reacting to the state government's move to prevent groups from carrying out awareness campaigns against Bangladeshi migrants, the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) today alleged that the Congress was more interested in safeguarding the interests of the Bangladeshi infiltrators rather than saving Assamese people from being wiped out.

"The Congress government is more worried about their votes than the security of the nation," claimed AASU president Sankar Prasad Roy.

24 MAY 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

NORTH-EAST TINDERBOX

The anti-foreigner drive is surging again in Assam. Thousands of Bangladeshis have fled Upper Assam districts following threats by groups. *Sunday Times* looks at the underlying dynamics

On April 12, 2005, when Assam was celebrating the Rongali Bihu festival, youths at a Bihutoli in Chiring Chapori locality of Dibrugarh town were busy planning something else: an economic blockade of Bangladeshis. These youths set up the Chiring Chapori Yuva Mancha and launched a campaign on April 24, asking locals not to employ Bangladeshis or give them shelter. This campaign gathered storm, spreading to other parts of the state; it took on a communal colour and triggered alarm bells from Guwahati to Delhi.

With state assembly elections due in less than a year, the issue has taken a political hue with all the three major players in Assam politics — Congress, BJP and Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) — trying to exploit the issue to their advantage.

CAMPAIGN AGENDA: The Yuva Mancha had a four-point agenda: don't employ illegal migrants for household work; don't travel in vehicles driven by them; don't have any business transactions or rent out houses to them. A member of the Yuva Mancha, Anup Jyoti Gogoi says, "We witnessed a massive increase in the number of illegal Bangladeshi labourers in Dibrugarh in the last one year. That's why we launched a campaign to educate our people on the threat." The strategy worked in Chiring Chapori, and soon spread to entire Dibrugarh. By the second week of May, many Bangladeshi labourers had left. The Upper Assam districts of Sivsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat also witnessed the exodus.

Marina Begum, an Assamese Muslim social worker, says, "All foreigners have to leave Assam. Only bona fide citizens should be allowed to stay," though she is not a member of the Yuva Mancha.

The Dibrugarh district administration feels that a small issue has been blown out of proportion. "We only received calls inquiring about the exodus after they left Dibrugarh. Only 500 people left the city," says H N Borah, deputy commissioner of Dibrugarh. Intelligence agencies say 6,000 people have fled towards the Lower Assam districts and Guwahati. Unofficial local sources say that nearly 15,000 people might have left the four Upper Assam districts so far.

POLITICAL FIAT: Chiring Chapori Yuva Mancha has no political backing, but is receiving moral support from the BJP and AGP. "There is nothing wrong with such a peaceful campaign. These youths are educating the Assamese people to start an economic blockade of migrants," says Sarbananda Sonowal, AGP MP. The Congress cannot openly criticise the Yuva Mancha as it might antagonise Assamese votes. But it has declared that those who left Dibrugarh are genuine citizens of Barpeta, Darrang and Goalpara districts of Lower Assam. It has even warned against spreading any campaign against religious minorities.

But minority leaders are up in arms against the government for allowing certain organisations to persecute Muslim labourers. They argue that foreigners should be detected and deported under the existing Illegal Migration (Determination by Tribunals) Act. Meanwhile, in other districts, the local units of All Assam Students Union and

Asom Jatiya Yuba Chattra Parishad have taken over the campaign. And SMSs are being sent to spread the message and threats.

VIOLENT HISTORY: The current problem dates back to November 2003 when ULFA militants launched a violent campaign against Hindi-speaking people, particularly Biharis who comprise one of the biggest components of the labour force in the Dibrugarh-Tinsukia belt.

The 2003 problem started when Assamese

students demanded 100% job reservations for locals in Group-D jobs in Northeast Frontier Railways. Local students harassed Bihar candidates who came to Guwahati for the recruitment test, while Biharis retaliated by attacking Northeastern passengers in trains passing through Bihar.

Retaliatory attacks in Assam took a violent turn with ULFA killing many Hindi-speaking labourers. "The 2003 problem was created by militants and the Assamese are not against Biharis. Over 20,000 Biharis

labourers left the place during that period," says Sohan Lal Yadav, a lecturer of Dirbu College.

Since then, the labour shortage has been felt even more with the launching of new projects in and around Dibrugarh. In the last one-and-a-half years, many Bengali-speaking Muslims came to work as manual labourers, rickshaw-pullers, thela-wallas and brick kiln workers. But, unlike Biharis, these people came with their families, creating an impression that they wanted to settle down here.

LABOUR TROUBLE: Now that the suspected Bangladeshis have left Dibrugarh, there's a vacuum in the labour market again. Girin Phukan, professor of Political Sciences at Dibrugarh University, says, "Though Assamese do not go for low grade work, people would rise to the occasion."

—Oinam Sunil

WIDE ANGLE



TIMELINE: THE RISE OF ANTI-FOREIGNER SENTIMENTS

ASSAM AGITATION

- **1971:** Bangladesh becomes independent; Indo-Bangla border turns soft
- **1972:** Pact with Bangladesh on granting Bangladeshis who came to India before March 25, 1971 Indian citizenship.
- **1971-79:** People worry about changes in the state's demography.
- **April 7, '79:** ULFA set up

- **Sept, '79:** Anti-foreigner drive by All Assam Students Union begins
- **Feb 18, '83:** 1,600 Bengali-speaking Muslims killed in Nellie massacre
- **Aug 15, '85:** Assam accord signed. March 25, 1971 is cut-off date for detecting foreigners.
- **1985:** AGP formed, assembly polls held, P K Mahanta becomes CM.

PRESENT CRISIS

- **Nov '03:** Conflict over railways' recruitment and reservation of jobs. ULFA violence against Bihar labourers, who flee Assam.
- **2004-2005:** Suspected Bangladeshis migrate to Upper Assam districts.
- **April 12, 2005:** Some youths in Dibrugarh discuss economic blockade of Bangladeshis.

- **April 24:** Chiring Chapori Yuva Mancha set up. Leaflets ask locals not to employ or provide shelter to Bangladeshis.
- **May 2nd week:** Exodus from Upper Assam districts
- **May 16:** Assam gov't says those who left Dibrugarh are citizens from Darrang, Goalpara, Barpeta and Nagaon districts

Infighting cripples Bodo elections

By Bijay Sankar Bora

The Bodo quest for autonomy and their campaign to become masters of their own destiny have been dealt a severe blow by a bitter power struggle within the nascent Bodo People's Progressive Forum (BPPF) during the first election to the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) on 13 May.

This is all the more ironic because the elections and the BPPF are fruits of a peace accord signed by the now disbanded Bodo Liberation Tiger (BLT) with the Government of India in February, 2003. The elections could have been a red-letter day for Bodo aspirations for greater autonomy but turned out to be a dark chapter in the community's struggle to determine its future.

At least 30 people were injured as large-scale violence, group clashes between Bodos, snatching of ballot boxes and rigging marred the BTC elections. The district administration admitted that polling was not free and fair in many places and a repoll was ordered in 144 polling stations spread over 22 BTC constituencies of a total of 40.

Elections were held in 35 constituencies as five candidates won unopposed, including former BLT chairman Hargrama Mohilary, in the remaining constituencies.

The scale of violence was not unexpected. In the run-up to the elections, there were clashes between supporters of official BPPF candidates and those of Independent candidates backed by the former BLT chief. Because of the allegations of rigging by rival groups, the results of this much-awaited election have been postponed indefinitely.

The poll violence was an ugly manifestation of the power struggle in the month-old BPPF, a political party formed by leaders of the dissolved BLT and former leaders of the powerful All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU). Though the former ABSU chief, Rabiram Narzary, be-

came the new party's first president, it was sharply divided into two groups. One comprised of former ABSU men and the other faction of ex-BLT men and their supporters, headed by Mr

and open. Mr Mohilary declared in public that he would leave no stone unturned to prevent his own party president Rabiram Narzary from becoming the council's chief executive member (CEM).

Mr Narzary sought to

Open Forum



A Bodo woman casts her vote for the Bodoland Territorial Council polls at Tamulpur, Nalbari district of Assam. — Eastern Projections

Mohilary, former leader of the armed militants.

Both factions vied to capture power in the BTC after the polls, which the BPPF confidently claimed it would win given the low-key participation by other major parties in the state. The ruling Congress chose not to contest the polls.

The former BLT faction's claim to power is spurred by the fact that the BTC is a fruit of peace negotiations between the former armed group and New Delhi; the ABSU-backed faction wants to control the council as it believes that the students organisation played a key role in mobilising mass support for the peace process.

The infighting was vicious

place himself above power politics, saying that he was not eyeing the CEM's post but wanted to become an elected member of the BTC and keep a close watch on the functioning of the council, the outcome of years of struggle by the Bodos against control from Dispur, capital of Assam.

The rift between Mr Mohilary and Mr Narzary came into the open with the former sponsoring an ex-BLT man, Mono Kumar Brahma, as an Independent candidate against the BPPF president at Bonorgaon constituency, Kokrajhar district.

Mr Mohilary had the dubious distinction of openly backing several Independent candi-

dates, all former BLT cadres, against official BPPF candidates. It all started with the allotment of party tickets. The former armed cadres in the party accused the party president of favouring former ABSU men and ignoring several senior leaders of the BLT.

As accusations and counter-accusations flew, tension and bitterness began to rise, with sporadic incidents among rivals later escalating into a full-blown confrontation during the election, showing up the greed for power and position — as is the case elsewhere.

Part of the tragedy is that the Bodo people lack a leader of the stature of Upendra Brahma, regarded as the father of the Bodo campaign for separation from Assam.

He died an untimely death in the 1990s. Of course, it could be argued that the lack of inspiring leadership is not just a problem in Assam but across the country.

Losing face after baring their hunger for power, leaders of both factions in the BPPF are now looking for excuses. The BPPF president, Mr Narzary says that the Congress in Assam played "dirty" games to drive a wedge in the BPPF, while Mr Mohilary was firm in denying any "official" understanding with the Congress on the BTC polls.

As expected, the ruling party has vehemently denied its role in BTC polls though the Opposition Asom Gana Parishad charged it with encouraging the rift.

The BTC was formed after the Bodo Peace Accord of February, 2003 and an interim council headed by former BLT chairman Mr Mohilary took charge of the council in December, 2003.

After an elected council assumes charge of the council, the Centre is committed under the BTC Accord to provide an annual grant of Rs 100 crore for five years to the council for development of BTC areas in Assam.

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

2.1. MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

অসমে রাজ্যপাল-মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর বিরোধ অনুপ্রবেশ নিয়ে

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, গুয়াহাটি, ১৯ মে: অসমে বাংলাদেশি অনুপ্রবেশ নিয়ে রাজ্যপালের সঙ্গে মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর বিরোধ প্রকাশ্যে চলে এলো। সংবাদপত্রে 'ফাঁস' হয়ে যাওয়া রাজ্যপাল অজয় সিংহের অনুপ্রবেশ সংক্রান্ত একটি গোপন রিপোর্ট সম্পর্কে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী তরুণ গগৈ আজ বলেন, "রাজ্যপালের রিপোর্ট ভিত্তিহীন। ওই রিপোর্টে কোনও তথ্য নেই।"

রাজ্যপালের গোপন রিপোর্ট প্রকাশ্যে চলে আসায় বাংলাদেশি অনুপ্রবেশ নিয়ে বিজেপি, অগপ-র মতো বিরোধী রাজনৈতিক দলগুলির ধারাবাহিক প্রচারে নতুন মাত্রা যোগ হয়। দিল্লিতে রাজ্যপালদের এক সম্মেলনে পেশ করার জন্য অজয় সিংহ অনুপ্রবেশ সংক্রান্ত ওই রিপোর্টটি তৈরি করেছিলেন। কিন্তু সেই সম্মেলন বাতিল হওয়ায় রাজ্যপালের রিপোর্ট আর পেশ করা হয়নি। পরে, "ফাঁস" হয়ে যায় ওই রিপোর্ট।

রিপোর্টে রাজ্যপাল জানান, উত্তর-পূর্বের রাজ্যগুলিতে প্রতিদিন ৬ হাজার লোক সীমান্ত পেরিয়ে ঢুকছে। ওই অনুপ্রবেশকারীদের সঙ্গে বিভিন্ন মৌলবাদী জঙ্গিরাও ঢুকে পড়ছে। তাঁর কথায়, এর ফলে রাজ্যগুলির জনগোষ্ঠীর বিন্যাস বদলে যাচ্ছে। রিপোর্ট 'ফাঁস' হওয়ার পরে রাজ্যপাল কোনও প্রতিক্রিয়া জানাননি। সেই

রিপোর্ট সম্পর্কে আজ মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর প্রশ্ন করা হলে ক্রুদ্ধ গগৈ বলেন, "কোথায় ওই রিপোর্ট পেলেন রাজ্যপাল, তার প্রমাণ দিন।"

তাঁকে প্রশ্ন করা হয়, রাজ্যপালের সঙ্গে বিরোধ তৈরি হওয়ায় তিনি কি অজয় সিংহকে সরিয়ে নেওয়ার দাবি করবেন? সরাসরি উত্তর না দিয়ে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বলেন, "সেটা অন্য ব্যাপার।"

অসমের প্রাক্তন রাজ্যপাল এস কে সিংহ এক কেন্দ্রের কাছে পেশ করা এক গোপন রিপোর্টে অভিযোগ করেছিলেন, অসমের চারটি জেলা অনুপ্রবেশকারীদের দখলে চলে গিয়েছে। তিনও রাজ্যের জনবিন্যাস বদলে যাওয়ার অভিযোগও করেছিলেন তিনি। প্রাক্তন রাজ্যপালের রিপোর্টকে ভিত্তি করে সুপ্রিম কোর্টে একটি মামলা চলছে। অসমে অনুপ্রবেশ নিয়ে একটি রিপোর্ট পেশ করার জন্য কেন্দ্রকে নির্দেশ দিয়েছে সুপ্রিম কোর্ট। এই অবস্থায় বর্তমান রাজ্যপালের প্রায় একই সুরে তৈরি রিপোর্টকে কেন্দ্র করে সাংবিধানিক সঙ্কট দেখা দিতে পারে বলে মনে করছে রাজনৈতিক মহল।

রাজ্যপালের রিপোর্টকে পুরোপুরি ভিত্তিহীন বলার মতোই মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর অভিযোগ, বাংলাদেশি বিতাড়নের নামে রাজ্যে দাঙ্গা বাধাতে চাইছে বিজেপি, আরএসএস। তাঁর কথায়, "অসমকে গোধরা বানাতে দেওয়া

হবেনা।" সম্প্রতি উজান অসমে অনামী এক সংগঠনের 'আর্থ-সামাজিক' বয়কটের ডাকে আতঙ্কিত কয়েক হাজার বাংলাভাষী মুসলিম সম্প্রদায়ের মানুষ ঘর ছেড়ে চলে গিয়েছেন। প্রচার হয়েছে মোবাইল ফোনে এসএমএস পাঠিয়ে, লিফলেট বিলি করে। ওই 'হাই-টেক' প্রচারের পিছনে আরএসএস-এর মস্তিষ্ক আছে বলে অভিযোগ মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর।

সদ্য দলের রাজ্য ইউনিটের দায়িত্ব নেওয়া বিজেপি নেতা শ্রমোদ মহাজনকেও কাঠগড়ায় দাঁড় করিয়েছেন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী। তিনি বলেছেন, "এ সব মহাজনের গেমপ্ল্যান।" তাঁর হুঁশিয়ারি, "আইন কেউ হাতে তুলে নিলে ছাড়া হবে না। মহাজন হলেও না।"

সরকারের চার বছর পূর্তি উপলক্ষ্যে আজ এক সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বলেন, "অনুপ্রবেশ বন্ধ হয়ে গিয়েছে, সেই দাবি আমি কখনই করছি না। কিন্তু অনুপ্রবেশের হার যে নিম্নগামী, তা রেকর্ডই বলছে। সেই কারণে রাজ্যে সমস্যার বিচারে জঙ্গি কার্যকলাপ রয়েছে 'এক নম্বর'-এ, অনুপ্রবেশ 'দু'নম্বর'-এ।"

গগৈ বলেন, "আমরা সমস্যাটিকে গুরুত্ব দিচ্ছি বলেই থানা পর্যায়ে কমিটি গঠন করছি, দু'বছরের মধ্যে 'ন্যাশনাল রেজিস্টার অব সার্টিফিকেট' চূড়ান্ত করার সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছি।"

20 MAY 2005

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

Gogoi blames BJP for exodus

MS
Statesman News Service



Mr Tarun Gogoi

GUWAHATI, May 19. — The RSS and BJP were behind the “exodus” of suspected illegal Bangladeshi immigrants from Dibrugarh following a campaign launched by a local youth organisation, Assam chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi said today.

J. N. B. B. B. B.
Speaking to the media on the occasion of completion of four years in the office, the chief minister fired a broadside at BJP leader Mr Promod Mahajan who has been put in charge of Assam affairs by the BJP till the Assembly polls, for implementing the RSS game plan aimed at creating communal divide in the state.

5.3
“The innovative campaign by Chiring Chapori Yuba Manch of Dibrugarh against illegal Bangladeshi immigrants started after Mr Mahajan had been put in charge of BJP affairs in Assam. I will not allow Mr Mahajan to recreate Godhra in Assam which is known for peaceful coexistence by different communities,” Mr Gogoi said.

20 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

Loaves and fishes

Bodo highrollers at it again

Having fought for and won greater autonomy under the Sixth Schedule, Bodo leaders have now realised that the way to power is not all that rosy. The first elections to the Bodo Territorial Council on Friday, 13 May, should rattle their collective conscience because reports speak of large-scale rigging and booth-capturing and some candidates even flouting election norms. The order for repolling in more than 100 centres, out of 2525 in four districts that constitute Bodo territory, is indicative of how their supporters made a mockery of a democratic exercise. That some trouble was brewing was clear from the manner in which Bodo leaders indulged in manoeuvring to outplay each other at the time of distribution of tickets. Formed last month to fight the elections, the Bodo People's Progressive Front comprised the All Bodo Students' Union and cadres of the Bodo Liberation Tigers (since disbanded) and other social groups with former Absu chief Rabiram Narzary as president. But soon enough, Narzary fell out with former BLT chief Hagrama Mahilary when the latter supported the party's official candidates.

There is nothing surprising in the latest development because Bodo leaders amplify their preference for cynicism and oneupmanship in a tussle that is clearly over loaves and fishes. But they must realise the importance of unity, particularly at this crucial moment when they are expected to fulfil political, social and cultural aspirations of those they claim to serve. It is naive to assume that by virtue of being the main signatory to the BTC accord the coveted post of chief executive should go to a former militant leader. Bodo leaders need to acquire the virtue of accommodation.

18 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

Irate Manipur tribals warn of counter-stir

RAHUL Karmakar
Guwahati, May 17

SCRIPT CHANGE ROW

TRIBAL ORGANISATIONS in Manipur have threatened a counter-stir if the Okram Ibobi Singh government did not review its decision to 'impose' Meitei Mayek script for the Manipuri language replacing the existing Bengali script.

Bowing to the demands of the Meitei Erol Eyek Loinasillon Apunba Lup, the Manipur Cabinet had on May 14 taken a decision to replace the Bengali script with Meitei Mayek, the script that was abandoned 300 years ago.

Accordingly, the Cabinet decided to introduce Meitei Mayek in a phased manner from the 2006-07 academic session. And given the mental divide between the Valley-dwellers and the state's hill people, it resolved to allow non-Meitei communities to use Roman script for the Manipuri language.

"Meitei Mayek or Roman, either way it will be an imposition on the tribal people," said Paul Langhu, president of All Naga Students Association of Manipur (ANSAM). "The Bengali script had been imposed upon us more than a decade ago, but the hill people have come to terms with it."

While the Valley districts—Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishenpur and Thoubal—are dominated by the Meiteis, the five hill districts of Manipur are peopled by Nagas, Kukis and related tribes. Learning Manipuri is compulsory for all

up to Class VIII.

Along with the Kuki Students Organisation, the ANSAM had on April 19 submitted a memorandum to the Manipur governor, chief minister and other officials airing their opposition to the Meitei Mayek script. The two tribal bodies have taken a similar stand following the Cabinet decision in favour of the script switch.

"The government did not heed our request not to take any hasty decision besides allowing the hill people choose their own subjects," Langhu said. "We shall be compelled to launch a counter movement if the government does not review its decision to impose Meitei Mayek."

If the Cabinet decision has rubbed the Nagas and Kukis the wrong way, the government's insistence on 27 letters for the Meitei Mayek script has angered puritans in Manipur. Hardliners have questioned the government's decision to approve 27 letters instead of the 36 letters that the Meitei Mayek script had in its oldest form.

A civil judge of the Bishenpur district court put the government in a quandary recently by ruling in favour of the 36-letter Meitei Mayek script, arguing that her judgment was based on the script popularised by Laininghal Naoriya Phulo and known as Meitei Shangleigi Bibaran Sijinaramba Mayek in its original form.

18 MAY 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Assam backs stir leaders

Names of non-Muslim 'aliens' highlighted to avert backlash

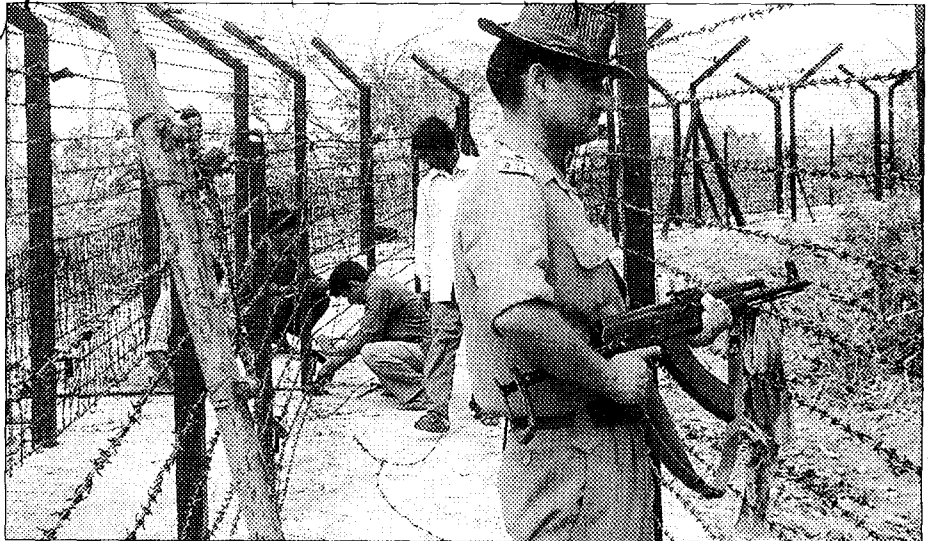
RAHUL Karmakar
Guwahati, May 16

THE TARUN Gogoi government in Assam on Monday gave a clean chit to the oust-Bangladesh campaigners while highlighting the names of non-Muslim 'aliens' deported during the last fortnight to avert a minority backlash in the state.

"There are no official reports of harassment of suspected illegal migrants nor any violence against them. So action against the people responsible for the exodus of predominantly Muslim labourers from eastern Assam is ruled out at this juncture," said rural development minister Ripun Bora, who is also the government spokesman.

Suspected Bangladeshis have been leaving three eastern Assam districts—Dibrugarh, Golaghat and Jorhat—following an economic sanction against them by an NGO named Siring Sapori Yuva Mancha (SSYM) formed in April this year. Soon after, the group began circulating leaflets seeking economic deprivation of all Bangladesh migrants living in Assam. A campaign on May 6 asking Bangladesh migrants to leave or face punitive action triggered a mass exodus almost overnight.

Bora attributed the 'ouster-Bangladeshi' campaign to a routine exercise against people of doubtful origin by the Dibrugarh district border



A BSF jawan stands guard as workers erect a fence at the India-Bangladesh border.

PTI

police between January and April this year. The Border Police had served notice to 906 persons in three Dibrugarh localities inhabited by minorities, asking them to prove their citizenship.

Of these, 382 cases were referred to the Illegal Migrants tribunal, which subsequently disposed of 248 cases. Out of these 241 were found to be Indian citizens while seven were labelled foreigners and 'deported' on May 2. The seven included three Muslims, three Bengali Hindus and one person of Nepali origin.

"It would be wrong to say the official process of detecting and deporting ille-

gal migrants is targeted against the minorities," an official said.

The government also played down the exodus figure, claiming that only 500 people left Dibrugarh. Congress MP Anwar Hussain and MLA Aftabuddin Mollah have each claimed 5,000 of the people driven out belonged to their respective constituencies.

Incidentally, the people suspected to be Bangladesh migrants hired buses or boarded trains to flee eastern Assam.

The destinations of the buses have been the minority-dominated Goalpara, Barpeta and Darrang districts.

500 people fled Dibrugarh: Govt

NEARLY 500 people had fled from Dibrugarh following a quit notice by a local youth organisation and the Assam government has ordered a probe into it, Ripun Bora, minister for rural development said on Monday. The exodus was from three localities of the town following the quit notice to suspected Bangladesh immigrants.

PTI, Guwahati

17 MAY 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Hurdles in the peace process

Not much should be read into Thuingaleng Muivah, general secretary of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah), saying that there could be a return to violence in Nagaland. The Naga peace talks may not succeed immediately — one may not see a dramatic development in terms of an “accord” being signed in a month or two. Yet one cannot say that the talks are heading towards failure or that a return to violence is imminent.

Muivah's conduct at the peace talks has been exemplary and there is no suggestion that he is eager to go back to the jungle. He has behaved with immense patience, explaining, not once but several times over, the position of the NSCN (I-M) and what the organization can accept and what it cannot.

It would be patently unfair to put the burden of success or failure of the talks on the NSCN (I-M) alone. Negotiations should not and cannot mean that the Nagas should come all the way. If that is the expectation, then even if Muivah keeps talking to New Delhi, his supporters will abandon him and the issue will remain unresolved. Leaving aside the difficult issue of integration of Naga areas for the time being, there are several other obstacles to be overcome by the two sides. These are: negotiating a new federal relationship; joint defence; organizing a Naga army; citizenship; organizing an appropriate judicial system; and openness to multi-party democracy.

The most difficult of these is of negotiating a new federal relationship. Yet one must understand that this formulation, presented in the NSCN(I-M)'s memorandum of April 1 2004, is a giant leap forward. In their memorandum of September 21, 2001, Nagas only talked of a “close partnership between Nagaland and India” — the two entities were seen as separate.

The Nagas came a step closer when Muivah and NSCN(I-M)'s chairman, Isak Swu, came to Delhi in January 2003, and said that India and Nagaland should become “two nations inseparably bound”. Still, Nagaland was seen as a separate nation.

However, India's oldest and most well organized insurgent organization is now saying that it is willing to explore “an appropriate federal relationship with India, governed by the agreement in such a way that it cannot be changed unilaterally in the future by either side.” This is indeed progress.

To expect that the Nagas should come all the way is both unrealistic and insulting to the Naga leaders who have shown great boldness in coming

TWENTY-TWENTY
BHARAT BHUSHAN



Return to the jungle

this far. The NSCN(I-M) has proposed that all competencies should vest in the Nagas except defence, foreign affairs, communications and monetary policy, provided that they have a say in the first three wherever Naga interests are involved. Now it is for New Delhi to start discussing the sharing of competencies, how they affect Naga interests and negotiate what is possible.

One should not react too strongly to Muivah's statement to the BBC that it was not possible for the Nagas to come within the Indian Union or accept the Indian Constitution. It is the political agreement between the two sides that will define the overall relationship — one cannot put the cart before the horse and give the relationship a name before it is negotiated.

In the BBC interview, Muivah spoke of “joint defence”... What this means is that in case of an external threat, the Nagas want a joint defence of their borders with the Indian army. What they mean is that they want an army of their own besides a police force. It is

this army which would jointly defend Nagaland with the Indian army.

Raising a Naga Security Force or Naga Rifles is not a difficult task. However, Muivah has to be clear that under this guise, he cannot hope to create a party army of the NSCN(I-M). The NSCN(I-M)'s armed wing should not be absorbed and converted into the new security force. To prevent it from becoming a Thangkul or a party army or an army loyal to Muivah and Swu, it would have to be raised separately from across all Naga tribes.

This essentially means agreeing to the decommissioning of the NSCN army. An agreement would have to be reached both on the timing of decommissioning of arms and accommodating the army cadre in central police organizations and rehabilitating those who are over-age or unfit in civilian professions. The demand for a Naga army remains a source of apprehension for the Indian negotiators.

On the citizenship issue, the two sides can come quite close. The Nagas want to be citizens of both Naga-

land and India. One possibility is that they accept Indian passports with a qualification noting that the holder is a citizen of India in Nagaland. How this is achieved is a matter of negotiation.

Two other issues, which have the potential of creating confusion in the negotiations, are the nature of the judicial system to be followed in Nagaland and the leaders' attitude to multi-party democracy.

The NSCN (I-M) wants the Nagas to have their courts and judicial system to follow tribal customs and practices. They say that they do not want to accept any Indian court except the Supreme Court. This is an untenable position. Even if it were possible to let the Nagas implement their customary law and procedure and have their own civil and criminal justice system according to that law, problems would arise in cases involving non-Nagas.

If such cases have to go to the Indian judicial system then they cannot just move directly to the Supreme Court. The Nagas would probably have to allow for two parallel systems of judiciary — Naga customary courts and Indian courts based on Indian civil and criminal law — with clearly demarcated areas of jurisdiction. Crimes (such as rape and murder) which may attract life imprisonment or capital punishment in the rest of India must not be left to customary law in Nagaland — no blood money or compensation for rape can be accepted.

The NSCN(I-M) also needs to come clean on whether or not it believes in multi-party democracy. Given the early Chinese ideological influence on its leaders, they seem inclined towards democratic centralism and a one-party system. No settlement should take away the democratic right of the Naga people to elect their leaders that they have enjoyed up to now. The peace dividend must not take away rights already enjoyed by the Nagas.

If there were an agreement, then within a year or two, Muivah and Swu would have to contest elections and prove that they continue to enjoy the mandate of the Naga people. The cure for an imperfect democracy cannot be dictatorship — however avuncular it might be!

Lastly, on the issue of integration of Naga areas, Muivah has suggested a way out. He has argued for a two-stage process — India should accept in principle the legitimacy of the Naga aspiration for integration; and then set in motion a time-bound process to achieve that. This process could be the setting up of a second state reorganization commission. This too, is movement forward.

‘The Nagas do not want to accept any Indian court except the Supreme Court. This is an untenable position’

Assam orders probe into 'exodus'

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, May 15. — The Assam government has ordered an inquiry into reports of exodus of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants from Dibrugarh.

The exodus follows a campaign launched by a youth organisation to impose economic sanctions on illegal Bangladeshi immigrants earning a livelihood in the area.

The home commissioner, Mr BK Gohain, has been asked to submit a report within 15 days. The chief minister, Mr Tarun Gogoi, yesterday rushed two of his most trusted lieu-

tenants, the minister of state for home, Mr Rockybul Hussain, and the minister of state for finance, Mr Himanta Bishwa Sharma, to Dibrugarh.

Hundreds of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants have left Dibrugarh during the past few days after the Chiring Chapori Yuva Mancha, a local youth organisation, launched an innovative campaign to purge the area of illegal immigrants.

The youth organisation has appealed to people using various means, including SMS, not to employ illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, not to have any business transaction with them, not to travel in any vehicle dri-



Bangladeshi labourers work on the streets of Guwahati. — AFP

ven or operated by them and not to provide them with shelter or rented accommodation.

16 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

THE NAGA PUZZLE

Unless we come up with some form of federation of ethnic groups linked by economic development, we are unlikely to meet the conflicting demands in Nagaland

LET us take a look at the causes of alienation of the Nagas and examine the options for a resolution of the problem. First and foremost was the fear of the traditional tribal society of the many Naga ethnic groups being culturally, socially and religiously overwhelmed and economically exploited. In spite of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution having been so well framed to cater for protection of the culture, values and traditions of such minorities and promises made that this would be ensured, the foisting of the Indian political structure on Nagas with its inherent inadequacies was seen as a breach of faith, imposition of Indian values and served as a cause for further alienation.

Creation of political boundaries split traditional territorial areas of the tribes and caused further discontent. These boundaries in many cases also disrupted social interaction and traditional forms of economic activity and trade. With passage of time the political structure (majority rule) and boundaries resulted in denial of development and employment prospects for the minority hill tribes in Manipur, Arunachal and Assam. The accord of 1974 satisfied only those ethnic elements who benefited from the boundaries and majority rule and gained the reins of power.

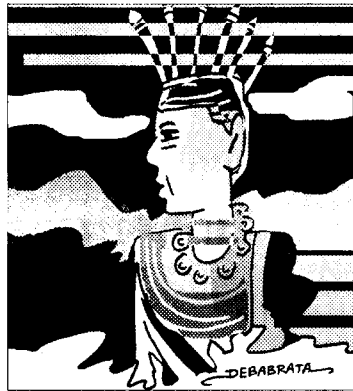
However, the Naga tribes that were left out, such as those in Myanmar, Arunachal, Assam, Manipur, or divided by the political boundaries, or were in a minority, were aggrieved by the accord and formed the NSCN. Ethnic distrust and blood feuds led to a further split in the form of the K and I&M groups of the NSCN. This has led to the current charter of demands (primarily that of the NSCN(I&M)), the more important among these being sovereignty — implying a very high degree of autonomy and creation of Nagalim or Greater

Nagaland to cater for the Nagas residing outside Nagaland.

Currently these are demands primarily of Naga ethnic groups not residing in Nagaland, led by the Tangkhuls of Manipur, with the rank and file being mainly from non-Nagaland Naga tribes; and who by force of arms have been permitted during the current cease-fire to take total control and are indulging in large-scale extortion over almost the entire area of both Nagaland and

east. It cannot also give power to the NSCN(I&M) in Nagaland as this will amount to Nagaland being ruled by non-Nagaland tribes led by the Tangkhuls. It cannot agree to a very high degree of autonomy as that would have repercussions on the federal structure of the Indian Union in general and the north-east in particular. The issue is — what, then, is the way ahead?

The mistake has been to seek a solution the problem of Naga-



Delhi will need to sell the idea that these boundaries are purely for administration and not related to the concept of territorial integrity

so-called Greater Nagaland. Many feel Delhi is a party to making the Tangkhuls supreme. Further, as talks have taken place only with NSCN(I&M), it is perceived as talks only with the Tangkhuls (even Issac Swu, a Sema, has not been permitted by Muivah to attend any talks involving policy matters). This will probably not in the long run be accepted by other tribes who are deeply distrustful of the Tangkhuls. In the event of an accord between them and Delhi, it may not result in lasting peace.

Delhi's approach, therefore, is fraught with danger. On the other hand, the people of Nagaland only are simply asking for peace with honour — implying autonomy and freedom to lead their own lives in accordance with the values of their particular ethnic groups. This is totally different from NSCN(I&M) demands.

Delhi cannot agree to create Greater Nagaland, as it would lead to similar demands from all other ethnic groups and result in major disturbances in the north-

not simply the NSCN(I&M). President's Rule needs to be imposed in Nagaland, Manipur and other areas affected by the problem with approval of Parliament so as to directly administer these regions, resolve problems and ensure rapid economic progress and development. To this end, Governors need to be carefully selected, given a free hand and if there is need to replace existing administrators, this should be done. All development needs to be in accordance with the will of the local people. A team of intellectuals and administrators needs to be appointed to ensure embodying grassroots democracy and traditional administrative systems which will ensure protection of the value systems and economic development of different ethnic groups, particularly for those outside Nagaland.

Extortion, drug and arms smuggling by insurgent groups should be reined in and intimidation of the local population stopped. Both the NSCN factions need to be made to abide by the terms of the cease-fire if necessary by force — even if this means a breakdown of the cease-fire. In case this happens the security forces need to be given a free hand to deal with the situation and, at the same time, ensure people-friendly operations with the minimum possible violation of human rights. A foreign policy offensive needs to be launched to deny external support to insurgents. The police forces in the area need to be revitalised and modernised to be able to handle the situation within a specific period.

Unless we come up with some form of federation of ethnic groups (not only the Nagas), linked by economic progress and development, with political boundaries being mere administrative limits, we are unlikely to meet the conflicting demands. In real terms, this implies creating an economic federation, that would progressively spread to the whole of the north-east. Only an economic union of this nature can get us out of the mess.

Think out of the box

When in an interview on BBC's *Hard Talk* last month Thuingaleng Muivah spoke of a special federal relationship with India it could have become a sign that the eight-year-old peace process is finally heading towards a settlement. However, it was not interpreted that way. Apparently our opinion-makers do not consider a special federal relationship a viable proposition. Nor can the kind of constitutional change necessary to create such a relationship be won in a bargain at a closed-door negotiation. Public debates have to first prepare the ground.

In certain ways, the climate for such a debate could not have been more conducive. Today, innovative new ideas are part of the discussion on the status of Kashmir. Consider K. Natwar Singh's sky-is-the-limit comment on what is possible. There is no reason why the same could not apply to Nagaland. However, whether the kind of national attention that focuses on Kashmir can be mobilized for the Naga question is another matter. When it comes to the North-east, we seem to be quite content to leave decisions to small groups of people: we don't even want to know very much until some crisis boils over.

There have been two major stumbling blocks to a settlement of the Naga conflict — the question of Naga sovereignty and the idea of integration of Naga-inhabited areas. Under the leadership of Muivah and Isak Chishi Swu, the Nagas have begun thinking of the sovereignty question in quite creative ways, outside the traditional paradigm of independence.

This has been an act of admirable statesmanship on the part of Muivah and Swu, and the single most important factor that has carried the peace process this far. There is no similar movement on the question of the integration of Naga-inhabited areas, but Muivah has indicated that he only seeks an agreement in principle. He is willing to give more time for translating such a commitment into practice.

Sanjib Baruah is visiting professor, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi

T. Muivah's suggestion — a special federal relationship with India — may well be the solution to the Naga dispute, writes Sanjib Baruah

It is in this context that the idea of special federal arrangements could provide a breakthrough. Muivah's reply to a question on whether such a settlement could be within the framework of the Constitution was suggestive. It can come "as close as possible" to that, he said, but ruled out a settlement "within the Indian Union or within the framework of the Indian Constitution". Yet it is hard to argue that a federal relationship can be anything other than one that is spelt out in the Constitution. Further, Muivah's reasoning on the issue was not based on principle, but on a concern that an agreement made today might not last, that laws incorporating such an arrangement can be thrown out later.

One can hardly blame Muivah for reading the Indian track record accurately. After all, that is exactly what happened to the autonomy that Jammu and Kashmir had once enjoyed. Article 370 had made India a leading

example of what political scientists call asymmetrical federalism — a federation where some units have different powers, or greater autonomy than others. In the case of Kashmir, it was done to make its constitutional status consistent with the accession instrument. Thus parliament's powers were limited to defence, foreign affairs and communication and the residual powers were left to the state assembly. Furthermore, the state's two top offices had special designations — Sadr-i-Riyasat, instead of governor, and prime minister, rather than chief minister. But gradually all elements of Kashmir's special autonomy disappeared, titles like Sadr-i-Riyasat were eliminated and Kashmir became like any other state.

Today a leading example of asymmetrical federalism is Canada, where Quebec has more powers in certain areas compared to the predominantly Anglophone provinces, and Spain,

where "historical communities" such as Catalonia, Basque Country and Galicia have more powers than other autonomous communities.

But unlike Canada and Spain, Indian public opinion has been ambivalent about asymmetrical federalism. To a large extent, this attitude was responsible for sealing the fate of Article 370. Article 371, which follows the constitutional provision on Kashmir, grants some asymmetrical autonomy to Nagaland and a few other northeastern states. That this autonomy has survived owes more to the lack of interest in the region in the rest of the country than to any active public support for such a dispensation.

A special federal relationship can be built on the foundation of the asymmetrical federalism that already exists in Nagaland. Indeed it might even permit the settlement of the integration issue. For instance, a second legislative chamber can be constituted to represent the interests of Nagas living outside Nagaland. Such a chamber elected by non-territorial constituencies — something like a Naga Hoho transformed into a statutory body — can recognize the trans-state nature of Naga identity and respect the territorial integrity of states like Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. But such an idea cannot be explored unless the neighbouring northeastern states are brought into the discussion as stakeholders in the Naga conflict.

One should not expect a final settlement to take the form of an agreement announced to the press at the end of secret negotiations. What the next stage of the Naga peace process needs most is not fresh ideas but active efforts to link what happens behind closed doors with dialogues outside. Such dialogues should involve not only Naga civil society, but also the civil societies of the neighbouring northeastern states and the rest of the country. The Naga leadership and the Indian government must now muster enough political will not only to imagine a viable blueprint for the future but a road map on how to reach there. And such a road map must include a healthy dose of public participation.



Honest effort

14 MAY 2005

14 MAY 2005

THE TELEGRAPH

Confusion over definition of 'indigenous Assamese'

State govt, Aasu search for natives' true identity

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, May 12

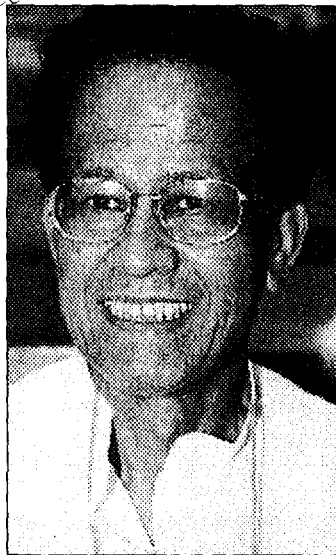
TWO OF the three signatories of the Assam Accord — the state government and All Assam Students' Union (Aasu) — are now trying to find out the definition of the "indigenous Assamese".

The question of "indigenous Assamese" came up on May 5 when the Centre had expressed its willingness to implement the accord, and had asked the state government to clearly define the in "indigenous Assamese".

Both the state government and the Aasu said the definition of "indigenous Assamese" was not clearly spelt out in August 15, 1985 when the Assam Accord was signed.

However, during the tripartite talks on the implementation of Assam Accord last week, the issue was discussed. The Union government has asked the state government to find out an acceptable definition of the "indigenous Assamese".

On the implementation of clause 6 of the Assam Accord, which provides constitutional



Tarun Gogoi
Answer please!

protection for Assamese people, the Aasu, state government and Central government decided at the meeting to revive the tripartite committee headed by a joint secretary of the ministry of home affairs for formulating

policies. The state government had asked the leading literary organisations of the state, including Asom Sahitya Sabha seeking their opinion on the definition of the word "indigenous Assamese".

The state government sources said that it had issued letters to Asom Sahitya Sabha, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Missing Sahitya Sabha and Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha on January 11, asking them to send their views on the word "indigenous Assamese".

According to Aasu adviser, Samujjal Kumar Bhattacharya, the students' body is discussing the issue with the leading historians and intellectuals to find out the definition of "indigenous Assamese". Aasu has also appealed to all sections of people to give their views on the issue.

The students' body says that the descendants of all people whose name were included in National Register of Citizen (NRC), 1951 should be considered as "indigenous Assamese", in an effort to end the confusion.

Tribal laws shield Assam Rifles

RAHUL Karmakar
Guwahati, May 12

THANK GOD for tribal customary laws. The armed forces have all these years wielded the contentious Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) as a shield of immunity while battling militants across the Northeast.

They have now discovered tribal customary laws offer better cover for "accidents" during counter-insurgency operations. The propensity of Assam Rifles (AR) to take recourse to these customary laws for damage control has led to human rights groups in Manipur pan unwritten tribal laws along with the AFSPA.

"The security forces are exploiting the poverty and fear of tribal villagers", said R.K. Bobichand of the Imphal-based Human Rights Alert, which has prepared a plea against misuse of customary laws to be submitted to the Manipur Human Rights Commission.

"Manipulation" of tribal laws came to light after AR personnel shot dead a 50-year-old woman, her daughter-in-law and infant granddaughter at Saitu, a Kuki-dominated village in Manipur during an anti-militancy drive. The Rifles averted an outburst of anger by striking a deal with the village chieftain. The men were "forgiven" after they paid Rs 50,000, a pig per victim, clothes and ornaments — according to Kuki laws.

13 MAY 2005 THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Bodo council polls marked by violence

RAHUL Karmakar
Guwahati, May 13

THE FIRST elections to the 40-member Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) on Friday were marked by violence and "improper electoral practices". The turnout across the four districts—Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baska and Udalguri—though was a shade below 65 per cent.

The Congress did not field any candidate apparently to win the confidence of the Bodos while the BJP and Asom Gana Parishad opted for a "token presence" in 18 and 15 seats respectively. Friday's polling was the end of a 12-year wait for the Bodos whose struggle for self-rule was realised when the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was formed.

The run-up to the election was marked by a stand-off between BTC chief executive member and former BLT chief Hagrama Mohilary and former president of All Bodo Students' Union Rabi Ram Narzary, though both belong to the newly-formed BPPF. The animosity spilled on to the streets on Friday with several vehicles being set ablaze in and around Kokrajhar town. Mohilary's supporters also allegedly assaulted a presiding officer in Banargaon constituency contested by Narzary.

"This is nothing but murder of democracy," said Narzary, referring to the brandishing of arms by Mohilary and his supporters in Banargaon area. There were also instances of snatching of ballot papers, and as a consequence repolling in more than half the 51 polling booths in Banargaon has been recommended.

"Proper election process has not been followed in many booths in Banargaon and Dotoma," admitted Kokrajhar deputy commissioner H. Sarma. He added there were reports of voters staying away from at least five polling stations in Parbatjhora constituency. "The reason is yet to be ascertained," he added. Repolling has also been suggested in at least 20 polling stations in Baska, Chirang and Udalguri districts.

13 ML

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Naga talks: territory first, sovereignty later

M.S. Prabhakara

ONE OF the positive features of the prolonged talks between the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) currently going on in Delhi is that there has been a near-total media blackout on what is actually happening. Such a view may appear strange, coming from a mediaperson. However, one has only to consider the breathlessness of the Indian media in the reporting of conflicts inside the country, in particular of the visual media which is endlessly caught up in the frenzy of the search for higher and higher ratings. Given this tendency, the virtual blackout of the talks — whose outcome will affect millions of people in the northeastern region — by the participants on all sides, barring brief statements about “progress being made,” suggests the dialogue is going on well.

The silence has been broken by the interview Thuingaleng Muivah, the NSCN general secretary, gave to BBC a few days ago. Mr. Muivah made some important points about the two crucial and interlinked issues — Naga national sovereignty and Naga territorial imperative. They are both equally compelling and causally related to the “uniqueness of Naga history and situation.”

Uniqueness

They are, therefore, central to any settlement of the Naga political question. Indeed, this is a constant refrain in almost all the statements of the NSCN leaders: The Government of India should understand the “the uniqueness of Naga history and situation.” Two aspects of this “uniqueness” are, one, that the Nagas were never defeated or conquered; and two, that the Nagas everywhere have always lived on their own land. What is historically Naga territory was cut up and parcelled out to neighbouring territories when the whole area was under colonial occupation.

While officially the area of Nagaland as it exists is 16,579 square kilometres, NSCN accounts of the history of Nagaland claim that

Integration of Naga-inhabited areas is at least in theory less problematic than concessions on the issue of Naga sovereignty.

“the present population of 3.5 million Nagas are spread out in several thousand villages over a 120,000 sq. km land area.”

In other words, the construction of the history and territoriality of the people in their neighbourhood has involved, without the consent of the Naga people, a diminution of their own history and territory. Thus, in his speech made at the ‘Naga Consultative Conference’ that preceded the formal talks in New Delhi, NSCN chairman Isak Swu did not even refer to the issue of sovereignty directly, though that issue still remains central.

“Unless the Nagas aspiration for unification of all Naga inhabited areas is fully realised no negotiated settlement with the Government of India is possible.” “No permanent and honourable solution can be hammered out to the decades-old political conflict without bringing all Naga-inhabited areas of North East together.”

On both these issues, Mr. Muivah is categorical and uncompromising. And yet, the interview also provides some tantalising glimpses of possible arrangements and compromises falling short of these objectives. Predictably, both the Khaplang faction of the NSCN and the Adino faction of the Phizoist Naga National Council have accused Mr. Muivah and other leaders of having already reached a tacit agreement on such a trade-off, diluting if not abandoning the more fundamental issue of Naga national sovereignty. This is not exactly the case.

However, it is also a matter of common knowledge and has been so for sometime that the NSCN leaders would agree, as part of a tactical incremental approach to securing a

settlement with the Government of India, to something less than absolute national sovereignty as a first step if there were to be a firm commitment by the Government of India on the integration of all Naga-inhabited areas into Nagalim.

Viewed historically and in the context of the Indian political reality, Naga integration, though a highly complex issue necessitating the consent of the three States concerned as well as a national consensus, is at least in theory less problematic than concessions on the issue of Naga sovereignty. After all the Indian Constitution does provide for the re-drawing of the boundaries of the constituent States.

Mr. Muivah also makes some distinctions on the nature of the Naga territorial imperative insofar as this would impinge on the territories of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and Assam, as well as the opposition within these States to an enlarged Nagalim.

Possible compromises

Two passages in Mr. Muivah's interview are indicative of possible compromises, though these are all the time qualified. Even while ruling out that the envisaged Nagalim could be part of the Indian Union, Mr. Muivah also concedes that unqualified sovereignty could still allow for sharing, though not surrendering, control over crucial issues like defence, foreign affairs, currency and communications.

However, this admission about the possibility of a “shared sovereignty,” a concept popularised and propagated by several “civil society” groups sympathetic to secessionist movements in third world countries, is imme-

diately qualified. “It's in the process of being worked out. It may be a little bit too early on my part to make pronouncements on that,” he said. This, in respect of external affairs and defence, is later clarified thus: “So far as our external affairs is concerned primarily [the] Government of India should have them. But whenever the interest of the Nagas is affected Nagas should also be represented.” The joint defence arrangement envisaged by the NSCN would entail India defending Nagaland in the event of external threat (“because if Nagaland would be in danger naturally the security of India would also be threatened”) but rules out Nagaland offering help were India to come under attack — this part almost certainly a tongue-in-cheek clarification.

Interesting nuances

However, on the issue of integration of the Naga-inhabited areas outside Nagaland into Nagalim, the interview is far less accommodating, though here too there are some interesting nuances. Mr. Muivah, who is not merely a Naga from Manipur but is a Tangkhul Naga, a people with historically shared links to some of the most intimate and profound aspects of Meitei culture and history, is surprisingly quite dismissive of the Manipur's opposition to Nagalim.

He even suggests that the violent repercussions in Imphal in June-July 2001 to the extension of the ceasefire to all Naga inhabited areas of the region was essentially manipulated by “Meiteis backed by the Indian Government.” The fact, however, is that the Nagalim envisaged by NSCN includes four districts of Manipur constituting over three-fourths of the State's territory.

In the NSCN's priorities in the matter of integration, Manipur comes first, followed by Arunachal Pradesh (Tirap and Changlang districts, which he believes the political leaders of Arunachal would be ‘willing to cede’) and last, the areas on the Assam-Nagalim border. In the case of areas of Assam claimed for Nagalim, the ground reality is that a substantial part of this area is already under the effective occupation of Nagaland. The territorial imperative of the putative Nagalim of the NSCN neatly dovetails into the present reality of the encroachment, consolidation, and extension of such encroachment of the 11 reserve forests in Assam by the State of Nagaland.

Complex issues

Given the complexity of the issues involved and the prolonged preparation that has preceded the formal talks, these are still early days. The States' positions (on both sides) need not necessarily be the final, take it or leave it, positions. And yet, if the NSCN general secretary has chosen to “put his cards on the table,” it could be to emphasise both his understanding of the complexity of the issues involved and the urgency of arriving at a settlement.

Federalism and autonomy versus unqualified sovereignty; contending territorial imperatives; and a constantly fluid political situation from which no structure, not even the NSCN, can escape. The interview provides some glimpses of how at least a beginning could be made, if not in resolving at least in reconciling these contradictions in respect of sovereignty and territoriality.

But concepts like “shared sovereignty,” or “cross territorial nationalism,” while sounding profound, do not always work in societies that are driven by exclusivist nationalist passions. Naga history as articulated across the political spectrum by the Naga people, including interestingly by the State Government in Kohima that has a BJP component, provides a telling example of the strength of such nationalism.

Finally, and irrespective of the NSCN leadership's calculations, a settlement, or even a substantive progress towards a settlement, is unlikely with the present coalition in office in Delhi. The coalition headed by the ‘right wing Hindu nationalist’ BJP would have had less problem making and selling a deal to its constituency than the United Progressive Alliance of “secular and progressive” parties. The various rebel groups in contention with the Indian state instinctively understand this seeming contradiction, at least in the northeast.

10 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

07 MAY 2005

THE INDU

Bodos divided

The Bodoland People's Progressive Front has already been divided into two camps, less than a month since its formation.

Sushanta Talukdar

KOV

IF THE run-up to the May 13 election to the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) is any indication of the future trends in Assam's Bodo politics, the fate of the new regional party - Bodoland People's Progressive Front (BPPF) - is uncertain.

The BPPF, formed on April 12, is now divided into two camps. The former Bodo Tiger Liberation (BLT) leaders and the cadres who returned to the mainstream ending their underground movement for Statehood are in one and the other is represented by the influential All Bodo Students Union. The ABSU spearheaded a strong over-ground Statehood movement and took the lead in the formation of the BPPF.

The cracks in the State's second largest regional party surfaced at the Kokrihar

headquarters of the BTC when several leaders of the disbanded militant outfit filed nominations against BPPF president Rabinam Narzary and several other official candidates.

The squabbling took a serious turn with the present BTC chief, Hagrama Mohillary, who headed the erstwhile BLT, extending open support to his former comrade in arms - Mono Kumar Brahma, the rebel candidate against Mr. Narzary in the Banangaon constituency.

Confusion prevailed when the voters saw Mr. Narzary and Rajya Sabha MP Urkhao Gwra Brahma sharing one platform to address election rallies, and Mr. Mohillary campaigning in favour of the rebel candidate.

For, till the other day - from the time of negotiations between the BLT, Centre and

the State Government and the subsequent signing of the peace accord on February 10, 2003 and installation of the *ad hoc* council body to run the new administrative set up to formation of the new party - all these leaders spoke in one voice. Besides, there were also reports of clashes between former BLT cadres and ABSU workers.

Mr. Mohillary and four other official BPPF candidates have already won the election uncontested. Mr. Mohillary and two Bodo MPs - Mr. Brahma and Sansuma Khunggur Bwisruthiary - were elected members of the BPPF's policy-making body.

The opposition to Mr. Narzary's candidature by the Mohillary camp was attributed to their apprehension over his potential claim to the top post in the BTC - chief executive member - presently held by Mr. Mohillary.

Efforts for a patch-up came in the form of a formal announcement by Mr. Narzary that his aim was not to become either the CEM or the Deputy CEM of the BTC. He only wanted to strengthen the BPPF.

The trouble began from the beginning of the electioneering process with the All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation, a key player in Bodo politics, withdrew from the new party because not a single woman candidate was nominated.

The influential women's body has now extended support to all former BLT leaders

who have stood as rebel candidates against the official BPPF candidates.

Mr. Narzary, however, blames unnamed quarters in Dispur for the division in the BPPF. The ruling Congress has not fielded any candidate for the BTC elections in deference to an appeal made by the BPPF. But the Asom Gana Parishad has fielded 14 candidates, the Bharatiya Janata Party 17 and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) five. For the major political parties the BTC election is also an opportunity to test the waters in Bodo dominated areas ahead of the May 2006 Assembly election. In at least 10 of the 126 Assembly seats, the Bodos play a determining role.

Of the 40 seats in the BTC, the BPPF has won five uncontested. The two camps will now vie for the remaining 35 seats of which five are reserved for non-Scheduled Tribes and one is open to all. The State Government will nominate six members of the tribal council.

Immediately after the formation of the BPPF, its leadership had expressed the hope that it would bring stability in the Bodo heartland after years of unrest.

However, the indications of the May 13 BTC election are that it is most likely to create instability unless the Bodo leaders can amicably settle the issue among themselves.

জঙ্গি বলে নারী-শিশু হত্যা, উত্তপ্ত মণিপুর

রঞ্জন সেনগুপ্ত • গুয়াহাটি

৬ মে: মনোরমা থাংজামের ধর্ষণ ও হত্যাকাণ্ডের অভিযোগ নিয়ে আন্দোলনের রেশ না মেলাতেই ফের অসম রাইফেলসের বিরুদ্ধে নিরীহ মানুষ হত্যার অভিযোগে উত্তপ্ত মণিপুর। গতকাল জঙ্গি বলে দুই মহিলা ও এক শিশুকে গুলি করে মারার ঘটনা নিয়ে আপনবা লুপ আন্দোলনের পথে পা বাড়ানো হচ্ছে।

৩২ বছরের মনোরমা থাংজামকে ধর্ষণ করে খুন করার জোরালো অভিযোগ নিয়ে এখনও গৌহাটি হাইকোর্টে মামলা চলছে। গত বছরের জুলাই মাসে মনোরমা হত্যাকাণ্ডের পরে মণিপুর তোলপাড় করে দেওয়া আন্দোলনের রেশ আজও বর্তমান। ওই ঘটনার পরে সেনাবাহিনীর বিশেষ ক্ষমতা সংক্রান্ত আইন ‘আফস্পা’ প্রত্যাহারের দাবিকে সম্মান জানাতে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার নিয়োজিত তদন্ত কমিটির রিপোর্ট পেশ করার আগেই ফের অসম রাইফেলসের বিরুদ্ধে নির্বিচারে সাধারণ মানুষ হত্যার অভিযোগ উঠলো। মনোরমার ঘটনায় আন্দোলনের নেতৃত্বকারী ৩২ টি সংগঠনের যৌথমঞ্চ আপনবা লুপ জানিয়েছে, আজ রাতে সংগঠনের জরুরি বৈঠকে আলোচনার পরে আন্দোলনের কর্মসূচি ঠিক করা হবে।

আপনবা লুপের অন্যতম আস্থায়ক সুনীল করম টেলিফোনে জানান, তাঁদের প্রতিনিধিরা আজ দুপুরে গতকালের হত্যাক্ষল পরিদর্শন করেছেন। আলোচনার জন্য রাতে সংগঠনের বৈঠক ডাকা হয়েছে। সেখানেই আন্দোলনের কর্মসূচি চূড়ান্ত করা হবে। অন্য দিকে, অসম রাইফেলস গতকালের ঘটনার উচ্চপর্যায়ের তদন্তের নির্দেশ দিয়েছে। রাজ্য পুলিশও পৃথক তদন্ত করছে।

রাজ্য পুলিশের ডিজি এ কে

পরশর আজ বলেন, “মৃতের পরিবারের সঙ্গে অসম রাইফেলস রফায় আসার চেষ্টা চালাচ্ছে। তবে প্রাথমিক তদন্তে জানা গিয়েছে, কুকি জঙ্গিদের সঙ্গে গুলি লড়াই চলার সময়েই ওই তিন জন মারা গিয়েছেন।” এ কে পরশরকে প্রশ্ন করা হয়, আবার অসম রাইফেলস কাঠগড়ায় দাঁড়ানোর রাজ্যে কি বিক্ষোভের সম্ভাবনা রয়েছে? জবাবে পরশর বলেন, “আমার তা মনে হয় না। কারণ, এটা ঠাণ্ডা মাথায় হত্যাকাণ্ডের ঘটনা নয়। মনোরমার মতো ওদের হেফাজতেও মৃত্যুর ঘটনা ঘটেনি।”

সেনাপতি জেলার কাংপোকপি এলাকার সাইতু গ্রামে আজও উত্তেজনা রয়েছে। গ্রামবাসীদের অভিযোগ, গ্রামের কাউন্সিল নির্বাচন নিয়ে যখন বৈঠক চলছিল, তখনই একটি মারুতি জিপসি গাড়িতে করে এসে কোনও প্ররোচনা ছাড়াই নির্বিচারে গুলি চালায় জওয়ানেরা।

ঘটনাস্থলেই একই পরিবারের তিন জন মারা যান। এঁদের মধ্যে দু’জন মহিলা এবং এক ১৪ মাসের শিশু রয়েছে। ঘটনার পরে রাইফেলসের এক পদস্থ অফিসার গ্রামে গিয়ে ক্ষমা চেয়ে আসেন।

হত্যাকাণ্ডের পরে রাজ্য মন্ত্রিসভার কয়েক জন সদস্য এবং সংশ্লিষ্ট গ্রাম-প্রধানকে নিয়ে এক বৈঠক করে অসম রাইফেলস। তাদের দাবি, সেই বৈঠকে সবাই একমত যে, জঙ্গিদের সঙ্গে গুলি বিনিময়ের সময়েই তিন জন সাধারণ মানুষের প্রাণ গিয়েছে।

গ্রামবাসীদের অবশ্য ওই দাবি উড়িয়ে দিয়ে মৃতপিছু এক লক্ষ টাকা করে ক্ষতিপূরণ এবং পরিবারের এক জনকে চাকরি দেওয়ার দাবি করেছেন। অসম রাইফেলস দাবি অগ্রাহ্য করে জানিয়েছে, গ্রাম-উন্নয়নে তারা সাহায্য করতে চায়। সব মিলিয়ে আজও সাইতু গ্রামে উত্তেজনা ছিল।

7 MAY 2005

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

Scrap Illegal Migrants Act, demands AGP

GUWAHATI: The opposition Asom Gana Parishad has differed with the views expressed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh favouring retention of Illegal Migrants Determination Tribunal (IMDT) Act, 1983, in the state.

Dr. Singh, at the tripartite meeting held with the All Assam Students Union (AASU) delegation and Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi in Delhi yesterday, had categorically ruled out the possibility of repealing the Act as demanded by AASU.

Talking to UNI here today, AGP general secretary Dilip Saikia advocated scrapping of IMDT as the act "was delaying the process of detection and deportation of illegal migrants and instead helping their continuous stay in the state".

"The IMDT does not serve the purpose of detection and deportation of illegal migrants who are threatening the indigenous population in the state," Mr Saikia remarked.

Regarding completion of the

border fencing with Bangladesh he said this should be done before the 2006 assembly polls. "Unless we fence the border completely with Bangladesh, we cannot check infiltration," he claimed.

The AGP general secretary also differed with the two year deadline set by the Prime Minister to upgrade the National Register of Census (NRC) with 1971 as the cut off year.

Mr Saikia favoured upgradation of NRC before the next as-

sembly polls.

Welcoming the initiative by Dr Singh to hold talks on the Assam accord, he wanted the Centre to work out a specific timeframe to implement the accord in toto.

Mr Saikia also expressed concern over the recent report by the National Commission for Minority (NCM) regarding the 'abnormal rise' in the Muslim population in ten districts of the state. The NCM attributed the growth to infiltration from across the border. -- UNI

07 MAY 2005

THE TRIBUNE

Manmohan assures Aasu on accord

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, May 5. — Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh today assured a delegation of All Assam Students Union on the implementation of the Assam Accord during a 150-minute meeting, even as he urged them to work with the state and the Centre to create a climate of peace and stability in Assam as well as the entire North-eastern region.

"Assam is truly the mother state of the North-east. If Assam prospers, so will all of the North-east," Dr Singh, an MP from Assam, told the delegation. "All the people of Assam and North-east must come together and create a climate of peace and stability so that the full potential of the region can be unleashed. Our effort should be that while we solve old problems we should not create new problems."

The Aasu team was led by its president, Mr SP Roy,

AGP harps on Bangla influx

GUWAHATI, May 5. — The Asom Gana Parishad has observed that the process of delimitation of Assembly constituencies in Assam should be sensitive to the issue of "demographic invasion from Bangladesh". The party has called for updating the National Register of Citizens before carrying out delimitation of constituencies. AGP chief Mr Brindaban Goswami today said delimitation of constituencies should be carried out only after updating the NRC till 25 March, 1971 that is also the cut-off date for detection and deportation of illegal migrants in Assam. "The situation is similar to that in Kashmir where the delimitation process has been kept in abeyance," he said. The AGP also demanded issuance of voters' ID cards before the delimitation process starts. — SNS

and included Mr Samujjal Bhattacharya, Mr Tapan Gogoi, Mr Prabin Boro and Prof. Basanta Deka.

06 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

Dig and delve

Ulfa riddled with deceit

That Ulfa is given to taking one step forward and two steps back is obvious from its latest statement that the "Assam-India conflict" cannot be solved within the constitutional framework and that Delhi needs to change its outlook. Sovereignty is all Ulfa's leaders can fall back on to stay in the limelight but Delhi is unlikely to compromise on talks on these terms. Coming as it does at a time when Assamese facilitator Mamoni Goswami is trying to bring the two sides together and expecting a response to Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa's letter to the Prime Minister, the timing of the statement suggests the motive is to pre-empt a reply from Manmohan Singh, the content of which is not difficult to imagine. Obviously Ulfa does not want to suffer the ignominy of insult through its offer for an "honourable" settlement being rejected. The outfit's duplicity is well known. Driven to the wall by Operation Rhino, it declared a unilateral and unconditional ceasefire in December 1991 only to save its skin and apologise to the people for mistakes on its part. It agreed to eschew violence and work within the constitutional framework, the only sticking point being the surrender of arms. If it was so serious on talks, it should have taken the truce to its logical conclusion.

Ulfa is as much a terrorist organisation as it is a tool in the hands of outside agencies operating from across the country, and it deserves to be firmly dealt with. Its acquisition of a US terrorist tag endows it with the importance of being the only dominant militant organisation in the North-east, the NSCN-IM having receded into the background and sued for peace. But unlike the NSCN-IM, Ulfa's credentials to talk on behalf of the people is suspect. And herein lies its weakness because its claim of an "Assam-India conflict" is absurd.

06 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

Peace talks with ULFA on track

But Bangladesh scenario worrisome

Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI: The Central Government is going ahead with the peace talks in Assam and informal, back channel contacts have been made to establish contact with the leadership of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA).

Despite the fact that the U.S. has given a "terror tag" to ULFA and the outfit's reported involvement in blasts in Assam, the Centre has chalked out a course to enter into a peace dialogue with the ULFA leadership. Highly-placed Government sources said the ULFA had been insisting on holding talks with the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and putting the issue of sovereignty on the agenda. Notwithstanding the ULFA's insistence, the sources said its leadership would soon be invited for talks first with the National Security Adviser, M.K. Narayanan. "There are positive movements on this front," the sources said.

The Assam Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, said the U.S. declaration would not affect the peace talks in which the State Government was involved. The Jnanapith award winner and writer,

Indira Goswami, had been acting as the ULFA's contact point with the Centre but the sources said there were contacts with ULFA at other levels also.

The ULFA's chairman, Arabininda Rajkhowa, has been quoted as saying that the outfit's inclusion in the list of terrorist organisations is a "ploy" by vested interests. However, security and intelligence sources said the U.S. declaration would put pressure on Bangladesh to check and curb ULFA activities at a time when Dhaka itself was being seen as a hub of Islamist radical outfits.

The operations to wipe out the ULFA camps in Bhutan had forced the group to depend heavily on Dhaka where its top leadership had taken refuge during the past few years.

Also, ULFA-sponsored attacks last August in Assam, when schoolchildren were killed, had drastically reduced the level of support for the group among the people of the State, the sources said. In such a scenario, the ULFA would like to grab any chance to enter into negotiations with the Centre. Assembly polls in Assam were also scheduled for 2006, a key factor in State politics.

03 MAY 2005

THE HIL

No solution in Indian Constitution: Ulfa

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, May 2. — The United Liberation Front of Asom has said that the solution to the "Assam-India conflict" doesn't lie in the Indian Constitution and the government of India needs to change its outlook for a lasting peace in Assam.

In a statement issued to the media here, Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa lamented that the Centre did not realise the fact that "it is not possible to find a negotiated settlement to Assam-India conflict within the ambit of the Indian Constitution. For that, a fresh outlook is required," he said. He rued that the government was more interested in bringing Ulfa to the negotiating table before the Assembly polls than in solving the problem. "For these people (both the state and the Central governments), negotiation means nothing but an effort to convince Ulfa to accept the Constitution of India and join the mainstream without caring for the solution to the conflict," he said.

The militant leader pointed out that like the exploited and revolutionary people of Assam and intellectuals sensible to the rights of the Assamese people, the Ulfa too wanted a permanent solution to the problem through negotiation. "But we need to cling onto our weapons and set preconditions for negotiation to ensure that we aren't cheated while try-

IMDT Act on Aasu agenda

GUWAHATI, May 2. — The repeal of the controversial Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act, 1983 (IMDT) and updating of the 1951 National Register of Citizens (NRC) till 25 March, 1971 will top the All Assam Students' Union's (Aasu) charter of demands when it meets the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, on Assam Accord implementation in New Delhi on 5 May. Aasu will ask for a "specific timeframe" for the implementation of the Assam Accord during the tripartite talks where Assam government will be represented by chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi. Aasu had initiated a White Paper on the failures of successive Central and state governments in implementing the Assam Accord. — SNS

ing to find a desired solution," he said.

On the US move to brand Ulfa a terrorist organisation, Rajkhowa said there had been a widespread global campaign to project Ulfa as a terrorist organisation as a sequel to specific campaigns in Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, China and Nepal.

The Ulfa statement came at a time when the PMO is preparing to send a reply to the earlier letter of the Ulfa chairman on peace talks. The outfit is game for negotiations with the government provided its demand for sovereignty is included in the agenda.

ULFA GETS USA TAG Will Washington armtwist Dhaka?

ULFA'S inclusion in America's list of 40 "Other Selected Terrorist Organisations" amounts to little since Washington admits the outfit does not threaten national security or citizens. It got the terrorist tag for continued attacks on civilians. Admittedly, Ulfa's victims do, no longer, target security forces, government officials, businessmen and traders. Ever since Bhutan turfed it out in December 2003, the outfit is targeting civilians, for example the Independence Day Dhemaji killings. Even the outfit's staunch supporters condemned the act and it might turn out to be Ulfa's nemesis. Terrorist tag on the pro-Pakistani Lashkar-e-Taiba and other militant groups has done little to improve the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. If the USA is so serious, it could put pressure on Islamabad to check infiltration. Delhi continues to turn a blind eye to Ulfa's growing belligerency, hoping the prodigal will return sooner or later. But if Delhi can call Nepal Maoists terrorists, why not Ulfa? There is a strong case for it. The Army acknowledges as much and that the Ulfa is in a proxy war with "surrogates armed and trained by hostile outside agencies", and must be dealt with accordingly. The huge consignment of weapons seized at Chittagong port last year was reportedly for the Ulfa — proof enough of who is behind the outfit's undiminishing strike potential.

Unless Bangladesh cooperates, Ulfa can't be tamed. The USA admits Ulfa is getting help from "unknown external sources". With its efficient intelligence system, it should have no difficulty identifying them. The USA will do well to persuade Dhaka to freeze Ulfa's escrow. This falls well within the Indo-US ambit of counter-terrorism partnership.

01 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

Ulfa inclusion in US terror list to aid India

Bikash Singh

GUWAHATI 29 APRIL

THE intelligence officials of Assam felt that the identification of United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) among the 40 terrorist organisations by the US would help Indian security agencies to keep a check on the fund outflow of the Ulfa in foreign countries. Intelligence input has already said Ulfa is investing money in Bangladesh and other South-East Asian countries besides investing capital in Bangalore.

The officials also felt that this move by the US would help India to pressurise the countries in providing shelter to Ulfa to dismantle their camps. It would give the countries additional clout in seizing and freezing the Ulfa's bank accounts and assets. In the new list prepared by the US, Ulfa is the only new Indian outfit to figure in the list of terrorist organisations.

The US state department brings out this list annually. Ulfa is the only outfit in the Northeastern region to be included in this list. The US government report has, however, not identified any country funding Ulfa. It just stated that Ulfa procures and trade in arms with other groups from the North East and receives aid from unknown external sources.

Director general of Police of Assam, P.V. Sumant told ET that the state police would have to look into the details and examine the report if the US government had issued any such report. Without seeing the report, it would be difficult to say what effect the report would have, he said. Assam home commissioner, Biren Gohain said the Assam government had not received any official communication about this report. We have also not received any communication from the government of India, he said. An official in the ministry of home affairs (MHA) said that branding Ulfa, as a foreign terrorist organisation would put Ulfa in a disadvantageous position in international forums. The US government can block its assets held in its financial institutions besides denying its members visas and making it a criminal offence for US citizens and those residing in its jurisdiction for any act of supporting or helping Ulfa in any way, he said. The official added that after the US list, the countries providing safe sanctuaries to Ulfa militants would be under tremendous international pressure to send their cadres out of the country. It would also pressurise the Ulfa to enter into peace negotiations.



Bodos get votes

New start for plains tribals

Elections to the Bodo Territorial Autonomous Council on 13 May will by all accounts be eventful because plains tribals will, for the first time, be sending representatives to the 46-member house (six are to be nominated). They could have gone through this exercise in 1993 itself had the Interim Bodoland Executive Council, installed after the Bodo Accord, not run into trouble after six months. Somehow it was allowed to continue without elections being held and was superseded last year just before the installation of the BTAC under the Sixth Schedule. Significantly, unlike the 1993 Accord signed by political parties, the BTAC was clinched by the militant Bodo Liberation Tigers after observing a truce for nearly three years with the previous NDA government. Ostensibly, by virtue of this the BJP has decided to field candidates for 18 seats and support the main Bodo People's Progressive Front in the rest. The BJP played a similar expedient game in Tripura by brokering a ceasefire with the National Liberation Front of Tripura but failed to find a toehold in the tribal belt.

Though the Congress gives the impression of not contesting the elections in deference to the BPPF's wishes, there appears to be some sort of understanding between the two by which the ruling party can rely on Bodo votes outside the BTAC jurisdiction in the 2006 assembly elections. The region is somewhat peaceful with another secessionist militant group, the National Liberation Front of Bodoland, also willing to hold talks. But apart from achieving political aspirations, Bodo leaders have too many problems. Some ethnic groups are demanding inclusion in the listed classes and, importantly, the Scheduled Tribe status of Bodos in Karbi Anglong district is yet to be decided. As a wag once remarked, the Bodos may become masters of their own destiny but Bodo tangles will remain forever.

Peace and security

Assam situation needs watching

As a facilitator between the Centre and Ulfa, Assamese litterateur Mamoni Goswami, does not think her determination to bring them to the negotiating table is a doomed effort. In touch with Ulfa C-in-C Paresh Barua, she also carries the goodwill of the people. She is confident that the Prime Minister will reply to Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa's letter which she delivered to the PMO three months ago. Though its contents are not known, Rajkhowa is said to have reiterated a formal commitment to sovereignty, something the Centre has rejected consistently. Since both sides are not prepared to compromise, it would perhaps make sense to sit for unconditional talks without fear of losing face. All Goswami wants is a breakthrough. So far so good, but for any talk to start there has to be a ceasefire, unless Delhi thinks Ulfa's December 1991 unilateral declaration is an "indefinite" ceasefire. The most formidable obstacles to the peace process is the shifting attitude of Ulfa's leaders and their contradictions. Even as they speak of supporting anyone in the 2006 assembly elections that would fight for its cause, they also question India's sovereignty and the electoral process. They should perhaps heed chief minister Tarun Gogoi's advice to contest the elections to gauge their popularity and then forward their demands in a democratic manner.

Ulfa has the capacity to regroup fast: as it did after the 1991 Operation Rhino and, following the Bhutan crackdown, as it seeks to establish itself in neighbouring states. What with the pan-Islamic jihadi groups (Gogoi recently announced the surrender of 50 of their activists) and the ISI, ready to destabilise the North-east, the region resembles a veritable powder keg. Gogoi has a tough job maintaining peace during the November National Games and assembly elections next year. Peace is of the essence, as is redoubling vigilance and security.

27 APR 2005

THE STATESMAN

Slack security

Ibobi ministry riddled with sloth

There is no way Manipur can get back to the somewhat peaceful 1980s. As in Nagaland, the Army's induction 25 years ago vitiated the atmosphere and the situation is such that one is not sure of returning home from work in one piece. The Army did capture N Bisheswar Singh, leader of the dominant People's Liberation Army, in 1981 but could not crush the outfit which continues to be a potent force. Bisheswar Singh fought successful elections from jail but his political career was cut short when he was shot dead, a clear warning that turncoats would meet such an end. Last week two unidentified youths reportedly walked into a Regional Institute of Medical Science Hospital ward in Imphal, shot dead a young patient recovering from bullet injuries and got away, Bollywood style. One cannot imagine the prestigious RIMS, situated within earshot of the Lamphel police station, without security cover. It was here in January 1995 that the CRPF mowed down seven innocent cycle-rickshaw operators and a doctor from Arunachal Pradesh, following an attack on their colleague.

The Manipur administration has often been let off the hook for lawlessness in the past, but it cannot escape responsibility for the burning of a 47-year-old central library in which about 150,000 books and valuable manuscripts were destroyed. Sensing trouble from activists of a Manipuri script revival organisation, which in February made a public bonfire of thousands of books in the Bengali script, the library authorities are said to have sought protection. That the arsonists reportedly torched the building in full view of library staff suggests the government made light of the request. Evidently, "serious" is an alien word for the Ibobi Singh ministry.

22 APR 2005

22 APR 2005

THE STATESMAN

Nagas, Assam in border row

■ Nagaland violates status quo, sets up offices in disputed areas, says Minister

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP
GUWAHATI, APRIL 18

THE Assam Government on Monday took strong exception to a statement by Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio accusing his counterpart Tarun Gogoi of taking a "provocative and aggressive" posture on the inter-state boundary dispute.

"We have noted a statement made by the Nagaland Chief Minister accusing us of being provocative. The reality is that while the inter-state boundary dispute is pending settlement in the Supreme Court, Nagaland is repeatedly attempting to violate a status quo and encroach upon Assam's territory," Assam Minister for Planning and Development Himanta Biswa Sharma said on Sunday.

Gogoi, who is currently in New Delhi, has al-

ready taken up the matter with the Centre.

"Nagaland has been trying to set up government offices and police stations in our area. They have already set up some government offices in the disputed areas.

Such is the attitude of the Nagaland government that its police even tried to prevent the Assam Governor from visiting areas that are well within Assam," Sharma charged. Interestingly, while encroachment by Nagaland has been an old problem dating back to its creation in 1963 out of the erstwhile Naga Hills District of Assam, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah)'s demand for creation of a "Greater Nagalim" has added fuel to fire.

Sharma said the Assam government was duty-bound to protect its territory and people, and would continue to do by all means. "It was Nagaland which has started this provocation while Assam has remained patient and law-

abiding. If Nagaland wants to violate a status quo initiated at the behest of the Supreme Court and the Centre, we have nothing to say," Sharma said.

The Assam government taken note of reports that people living on the border have been threatened and intimidated by armed persons from the Nagaland side. Local media reports even stated that the Nagaland government had allowed armed NSCN cadres to beat up some Assamese.

On Saturday, Rio said that if Assam was not restrained from abiding the interim agreement of 1972, there was every possibility of violent clashes breaking out along the inter-state boundary. Assam and Nagaland had officially clashed at least twice in the past three decades.

An all-party delegation from Assam, led by Speaker Prithibi Majhi met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the issue.

19 APR 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

Left in the lurch

Delhi trading water on peace initiatives

The Centre's stand that it would talk to any militant group that eschewed violence has been inconsistent. At least three outfits — the National Liberation Front of Tripura (Jamatiya), Achik National Volunteer Council of Garo Hills and the Dima Haram Daoga of North Cachar Hills — agreed to end hostilities during the NDA rule but so far, apart from the ceasefire, there has been no follow-up. Delhi did initiate talks with the NLFT(J) but Jamatia reportedly disappeared when told his demands — which included chief ministership — would not be accepted. This should not, however, result in his followers being left high and dry, particularly when they are eagerly awaiting proper rehabilitation and withdrawal of criminal cases against some. Political ambitions also prompted the ANVC to toe the straight and narrow path, so as to fulfil its demand for Greater Garoland. This possibly explains the Meghalaya government's difficulty in ceasefire modalities and talks. The DHD, the armed wing of the Dimaraji Revival Demand Committee, signed a ceasefire agreement in 2002 to also realise its ambition for Dimaraji, carved out of Assam's Cachar and North Cachar Hills districts. Despite observing a truce, the region is still a potential flashpoint. In 2003 as many as 30 people were killed in Dimasa-Hmar clashes (Hmars are said to occupy a majority of government posts) after the DHD was allowed to set up a designated camp at a site selected by the district administration and which happened to be in the Hmar area. Like the Nagas, Kukis and Paites in Manipur, the Dimasas and Hmars shared a peaceful bond for generations.

What is disturbing is not the rebellion — groups fighting against the establishment — but the growing ethnic insurgency and ethnic cleansing that threatens the future of the North-east. If the Centre agrees to the Naga demand for one administrative unit, it will invariably open a Pandora's box. Delhi can least afford to be magnanimous to any one group.

NEC NEEDS MUSCLE

Wed security and development

THOSE concerned should sit up and take note of the Prime Minister's remarks that the North Eastern Council is not living up to expectations as an apex regional planning body. Over the years, it has even drawn flak from members for what they described as a stepmotherly attitude with regard to allocation of funds. The council has been functioning as an advisory and funding agency and is engaged in removing infrastructural deficiencies. Unless given more administrative and financial powers and made the direct agency of the Planning Commission, it cannot be effective. More than this, the Prime Minister seems concerned about the continued neglect of the council's security role. His observation that security and development must go side by side deserves attention.

Since the Assam Rifles no longer enjoys the local people's confidence, proposals to set up a unified command under it are unlikely to get off. Some time ago, Assam governor Lt-Gen (retd) Ajai Singh rightly suggested "regional level strategy" involving security and police forces of all states, emphasising that in order to make it a success they should not be bound by ego. But who will be in command is a big question. It is the inter-services rivalry that put paid to suggestions for security coordination councils in the 1990s. Since insurgency affects all states — even Sikkim faces KLO and Maoist threats — and Dhaka refuses cooperation in flushing out Indian militants, there is a need for coordination among them, inclusive of West Bengal, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. This becomes practicable only if no state claims superiority and credibility for performing a job and, as an IB official rightly points out, each becomes an equal component of national security.

17 APR 2005

THE STATESMAN

Bold move to go nowhere

TWENTY-TWENTY

BHARAT BHUSHAN

After eight rounds of negotiations, the Naga peace talks are stalled. The leadership of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) suspects that the government's negotiators are following a strategy of trying to wear them down while simultaneously encouraging rival groups to challenge them in both Nagaland and Manipur.

There has been a spurt in the incidents of sporadic violence between the NSCN(I-M) and NSCN(Khaplang). The NSCN(I-M) claims that the Khaplang group is deliberately provoking it and that the Indian security forces are encouraging the latter to do so. It also alleges that a minister in Nephieu Rio's government is funding the Naga National Council and arming it.

In Manipur, it claims that the government is diverting food supplies meant for Naga refugees to the Meitei rebels, especially the United National Liberation Front. There are also allegations that the local government is supplying ammunition to the UNLF.

In short, suspicions are high and the lack of progress in the peace talks is fueling them further. The stalemate also provides grist to the mill of NSCN(I-M)'s rivals who have been accusing it of betraying the Naga cause.

In the negotiations, there is no movement forward on defining a new political relationship between the Nagas and New Delhi based on a division of competencies; and on the integration of the Naga inhabited areas. The United Progressive Alliance government is finding it difficult to move on these issues while the NSCN(I-M) considers them central to any settlement.

The reasons for the stalemate are ob-

vious. Redefining the relationship with Nagaland may open up a Pandora's box — other states of India may make similar demands at a later stage; and the integration of the Naga areas may create problems in the adjoining states.

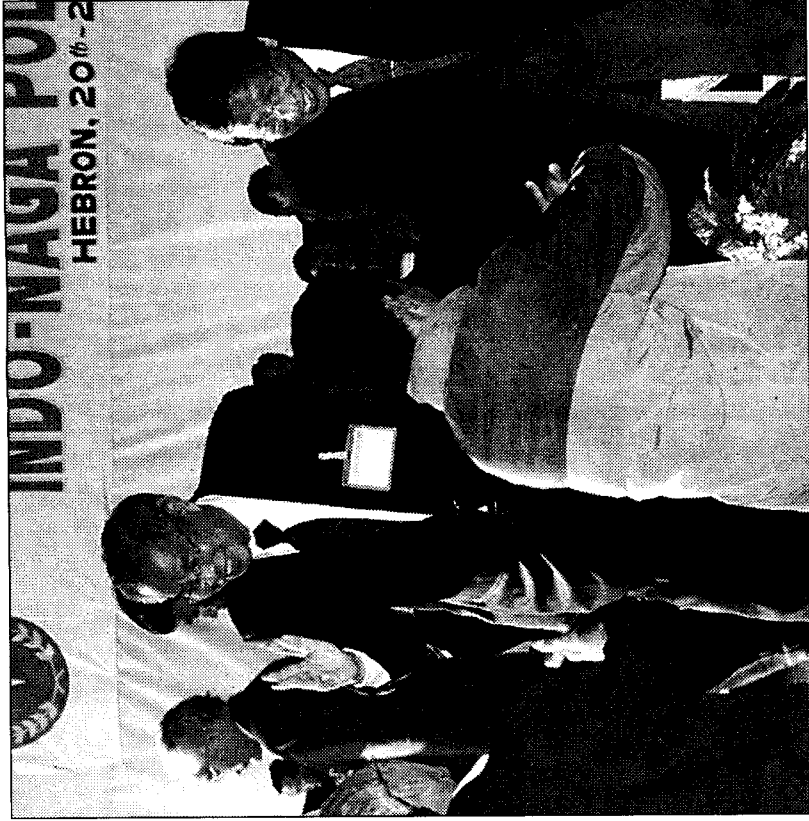
The possibility of other Indian states demanding a chance to renegotiate their federal relationship with the Centre, however, has to be weighed against the recognition by New Delhi of the "unique history and situation" of the Nagas. Isak Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah would be well within their rights to ask that if the Naga situation was not comparable to any other in India, then why should the Naga peace process be held to ransom for the fear of the adverse reaction of other states? The government negotiators are, however, neither saying yes nor saying no to re-defining the relationship with the Nagas.

The integration issue seems even more intractable for New Delhi — a concession on this issue may set the neighbouring states of Nagaland on fire. It is in these states — Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh — where their various tribes live, that the Nagas claim territory.

The experience of the Meiteis torching the state legislative assembly and bringing life to a standstill in the Imphal valley four years ago is still not forgotten in New Delhi. Even fresher are the images of old Meitei women disrobing themselves to protest against the alleged atrocities of the Assam Rifles.

The stand of the Nagas, however, is that they are not claiming anyone else's territory — not of the Meiteis, the Kukis, the Hmars, and the Assamese nor that of the non-Naga tribes of

There is no movement forward on defining a new political relationship between the Nagas and New Delhi?



Engaging smile

Arunachal — but only those areas where they have been living and farming since time immemorial. The non-acceptance of this reality, the NSCN(I-M) leaders feel, shows that New Delhi views the Naga issue not in terms of what the Nagas want but in terms of the interests of other ethnicities.

It is not as if the Meiteis are with New Delhi. There are many armed Meitei groups that voice grievances against India. The leaders of some of these groups are based across the border in Myanmar and refuse to deal with New Delhi. In contrast to the Meitei groups, the NSCN(I-M), the largest insurgent group in the North-east, has had seven years of ceasefire with New Delhi and has consistently shown a desire to engage with it. Muivah and Swu can then

legitimately wonder why sensible Indian politicians would want to worry about the insurgent leaders sitting in Myanmar instead of the NSCN leader sitting in New Delhi and negotiating with them.

The essential point is that there is no movement forward on the integration issue. The government negotiators have, however, promised to talk to the neighbouring states without accepting, even in principle, the legitimacy of the Naga desire to live under a single political unit. That, to the Nagas, does not even amount to accepting the legitimacy of their demand for integration, leave alone putting into motion a process to achieve that goal.

What underlies the current stalemate is also a peculiar understanding of the Naga issue in particular and conflict resolution in general in the UPA government. The basic assumption seems to be that there is no need to consider any demand of armed insurgents to amend the framework of the Indian Constitution; they should instead be brought within its existing ambit.

In this, the UPA government is making a bold, but regressive, departure from the approach followed by the previous governments starting from P.V. Narasimha Rao's to Atal Bihari Vajpayee's. The only explanation for adopting such a strategy seems to be past experience — the pole star of all bureaucratic. So it might be argued that the Mizos, after all, had also claimed that they were a separate nation — but did not the Mizo National Front leader, Laldenga, eventually come around to an agreement within the Indian Constitution in 1986?

In Punjab, too, the Anandpur Sahib

Resolution of 1973 talked of a Greater Punjab comprising the Punjabi speaking areas of the adjoining states of Haryana, Himachal and Rajasthan. The resolution also demanded greater federalism in terms of a truly autonomous state of Punjab. Did not New Delhi manage to resolve the tangle without conceding a Greater Punjab (akin to Naga integration) or changing the Constitution for granting the Sikhs greater autonomy? Why stop at 1973, there may be others who might argue that conceding the provision of Article 370 was a grave error and that India is paying for that "mistake" till today.

In short, the argument is that the Naga demands must be resisted as they fall outside the Indian Constitution and the NSCN(I-M) leaders should eventually be persuaded to see how their aspirations could be met within the existing constitutional provisions. The fond hope is that Muivah would follow the example of Laldenga.

We are then back to square one after more than seven years of ceasefire. This could well be a recipe for ensuring the failure of the Naga peace process. A lack of political imagination combined with a bureaucratic approach is bound to send the Naga leaders back to the jungle if not on a flight back to Bangkok or Amsterdam.

The argument is that the Naga demands must be resisted. It is hoped that Muivah would follow the example of Laldenga?

should this happen, the UPA government would be hard put to explain why it invited the leaders to New Delhi in the first place. If the ceasefire comes to an end or the NSCN(I-M) takes some other precipitate action, restarting the peace process in the near future may become an uphill task. So much of running around would have been done to stay at the same place.

hould this happen, the UPA government would be hard put to explain why it invited the leaders to New Delhi in the first place. If the ceasefire comes to an end or the NSCN(I-M) takes some other precipitate action, restarting the peace process in the near future may become an uphill task. So much of running around would have been done to stay at the same place.

Naga cliff-hanger

UPA caught in its own trap 55.6

Though the on-going Naga peace talks in Delhi have reached the final stage, it is still premature to assume the 54-year-old problem is any nearer a solution. The ceasefire has been the only substantive gain so far — it has held for seven and a half years — and neither side has allowed the trading of truce violations to jeopardise talks. Which is a measure of their determination to hammer out a solution. The demand for sovereignty, on which the NSCN(IM) repeatedly asserted there could be no compromise, is no longer a hindrance. But the Centre is in a fix over its insistence on a single administrative unit for all Nagas. Delhi's reported indication of requiring more time to discuss the issue makes it obvious there will be no final say — and how can there be without consulting Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur, whose territorial integrity is threatened? No central leaders have visited these areas to ascertain the mood of the people. The Naga leaders soliloquise that they are trying to reclaim land that belongs to them — a basis on which Meiteis can also claim Kabaw Valley which was ceded to Myanmar, and Arunachal Pradesh can also demand the return of Tuensang which was included in Nagaland in the 1950s. Former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee recognised the uniqueness of the Naga demand and gave them hope of a homeland, but in October 2003 he told a Kohima crowd that the integration issue was best left to the people concerned to decide. By which time the BJP already had a foothold in Nagaland — seven members in a Christian-dominated Nagaland assembly in the first go!

The UPA government has no such political gains in mind but its seasoned leaders should know better the consequences of indulging the NSCN(IM) by ignoring the clause in its own common minimum programme not to change the boundaries of the North-east states. The two Naga leaders spent two months in Nagaland and are now in a strong position, claiming people's support for their cause. They, too, have to save face. A settlement, if any, has to be acceptable to all, because the risks involved otherwise are terrible to contemplate.

07 APR 2005

THE STRAITS TIMES

Mule-back diplomacy yet again at Nathula



Mr Shivraj Patil who left for Arunachal Pradesh after his Sikkim tour, being welcomed at the Itanagar helipad on Monday. — PTI

Daborehi Chaki in Gangtok

April 4. — It is apparently the not so fancied "mule" that invariably carries the load of Sino-Indian relations, at least in the happier times, in this part of the world. Those were the times of "Panchsheel" when Jawaharlal Nehru rode on a mule to Tibet across the Nathula frontier amidst cheers of *Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai*, proclaiming the people-to-people bonding of the two lands.

And today, the home minister, Mr Shivraj Patil, took a Nehruvian detour through the "old silk" route with Sikkim chief minister Mr Pawan Kumar Chamling in tow.

For the first Indian Prime Minister the ride on the "mule" may have been more of a neces-

sity than a mere gesture considering the difficulties in traversing the terrain at Nathula in the late 50s, which, as the old timers say, nothing but only the mules could negotiate. Mr Patil, nonetheless, preferred the "good old mule" as Army vehicles and a chopper waited.

"I am making a ground assessment of the situation at Nathula," Mr Patil told reporters. Nathula would figure significantly in the forthcoming talks between the two countries during the Chinese Prime Minister's visit.

While Nehru may not have anticipated the "Chinese surprise" of 1962 and the conflict that followed his mule ride at Nathula, Mr Patil today did speak about keeping the guard at all times.

"The vigil must be maintained

at all times," he said. He also met the Chinese guards stationed at the other side.

At Nathula today he met the GOC of 17th Mountain Division of the Army. Consultations are reportedly on to replace the Army at the border by a paramilitary force in tune with peacetime practices and as a sign of growing normalisation of relations between India and China.

And for the people of Sikkim things have only changed for the better as far Nathula is concerned and most believe here that Mr Patil's visit would only add to that.

A closely guarded outpost till three year's ago with entry restricted to only the Army and its mules, today the place is a tourist hotspot and route to prosperity, as most feel.

NEXT ROUND OF DIALOGUE SCHEDULED THIS WEEK

Muivah impatient with talks pace

Sanjoy Hazarika in New Delhi

April 3. — Mr Thiuegalang Muivah, the Naga leader who is in India for talks with the Centre on the future of his people, is growing increasingly impatient with the pace of negotiations with the Government.

Mr Muivah, general secretary of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim, the most powerful of the three Naga groups, is the chief negotiator at the talks which are being conducted with a Group of Ministers. There have been courtesy calls and meetings with Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh as well as Mrs Sonia Gandhi, the chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance, and other senior political leaders, both of the ruling party and the Opposition.

Not less than seven rounds of talks have been held since the official discussions began here on 3 February.

The Naga leaders came to India last December and Mr Muivah has been here much of the time, with about two months in Nagaland. He has indicated that he wishes to return to Nagaland later this month and there is a sense of frustration in his remarks.

"They have to let us know, otherwise we can go back and tell the people," said one top Naga leader.

A fresh bout of talks is scheduled this week, perhaps as early as Monday, where the Group of Ministers led by Mr Oscar Fernandes, the minister of state for programme implementation, will have to deal with this growing impatience. The other Indian delegates are Mr



TESTING TIMES: Th Muivah

Prithviraj Chauhan, minister of state in the Prime Minister's Office, Mr S Ragupathy, minister of state for home affairs, and Mr K Padmanabiah, the long-standing representative of the government at the talks who has kept them going through difficult times.

In between these discussions, Mr Muivah has been on short visits to Agra and to Nainital.

This will be the 40th round of official talks since the peace conversations began with a call on the then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao by Mr Muivah and the chairman of the NSCN, Mr Isak Chishi Swu. It was at that time, Mr Muivah recalls, that Rao declared that there could only be a political solution to the Naga imbroglio, the longest running

insurgency in South Asia, now calmed by eight years of ceasefire and talks.

Mr Swu has not been associated with the intensive talks here and is currently in South-east Asia. However, he has been usually present at the opening of past negotiations to bless the discussions with a prayer and a benediction.

The NSCN leadership has indicated time and again that it wants specific responses to its demands for integration of traditional lands which are spread over the states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh as well as for conduct of defense and external affairs in collaboration with the Centre.

It says that it has put itself in a tough position because of the intense dialogues and is aware of how closely people back home, especially their foes, are watching their moves and the talks.

The government has been holding off from specific responses, which has irked the Naga leadership. New Delhi has indicated that it needs time to keep discussions going on the demands which could trigger intense reactions in the highly-sensitive North-east. Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have pledged to block the demand for a Naga homeland which proposes to slice parts off these states.

The question is how long can it hold off on addressing these issues directly. The NSCN is described as running a parallel administration in Nagaland and parts of Manipur, collecting "taxes" and enforcing its writ as well as recruiting cadres to its Army.

04 APR 2005

THE STATESMAN

Interdependence the key

ON 22 March, 1956, the Naga National Council and its administrative wing, the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN), declared Nagaland a "sovereign Republic". That was a trigger for escalating violence between the Nagas and the Indian state, which led to bloodshed and tragedy. This was seven years before Nagaland was carved out of Assam as a separate state, as part of an effort by New Delhi to calm the determined Naga campaign for independence under AZ. Phizo.

Forty nine years down the road, the Naga movement is divided but this day is still celebrated as the Republic Day of the major Naga groups which reiterate their commitment to a separate Naga land. It is celebrated openly in Nagaland by the group negotiating with New Delhi currently, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim of Thuienglang Muivah and Isak Chishi Swu. Not many Indians may be aware that within the country's constitutional and sovereign borders, under the nose of the Centre and the Nagaland government, and perhaps with their connivance, the NSCN and other groups conduct drills and rallies of their armed cadres and under the approving gaze of their supporters, invite media for coverage of these "national" days. It is an indication of who runs Nagaland today.

These events are front page news and full edit pages are given to run detailed statements by the groups, extolling their virtues and attacking others. There is even a Government of the People's Republic of Nagalim which extracts taxes, makes announcements and issues news releases. There are three such governments, excluding the state government of Chief Minister Nphieuh Rio and have a similar flag, sky blue with a rainbow and stars. This "Republic Day", Isak Swu, issued a fascinating statement, fascinating to Naga watchers because it appeared clearly to suggest that full sovereignty was on the back burner and Nagas must be both realistic and committed, an indication of where the talks are moving. The following are extracts from Mr Swu's statement. It invited a stinging rejoinder from one of the rival factions, the FGN, which attacked the "gimmick" of the peace process in sharp terms and warned Nagas not to be "misled".

But given the fact that the NSCN was able



PROUD NAGAS: The NSCN (I-M) general secretary Th Muivah (left) and chairman of the group, Isak Chishi Swu in traditional gear at Dimapur. — PTI

to muster some 8,000 Nagas at its consultation in January as part of its effort to be representative of all Nagas in the ongoing talks in New Delhi, such reactions are unlikely to have much impact on negotiations except to indicate that there are still strong, critical and unconvinced voices in Nagaland.

"We believe in the inter-dependence of nations" — Isak Chishi Swu.

The Nagas are known by their common history, culture, religion and by their common political aspirations. The Nagas, wherever they are, speak the same language when it comes to the question of national issue. It is because of this reason that the Naga people have come thus far despite several external aggressions.

In spite of the people's claim, to nationhood, it cannot be denied that a free nation could only be established through conscious efforts of the people concerned. It also requires a strong revolutionary political organisation that represents national

interest. There comes a time for every people and nation to take strong decisions for their future. The Naga people were invited to join the Union of India in 1950, but it was rejected by the Naga people. They took

Open Forum

the right decision at the right time. The Naga people knew that their culture, custom and their history were different from that of India. Then, the pertinent question before any nation is how a national decision is to be materialised. Decision alone is a futile exercise unless it is translated into reality. Political decisions are implemented through revolution which may be violent or non-violent. Both confrontation and negotiation are an essential part of revolution. There is a time when fighting for a good cause is a must, and there is also a time when negotiation is unavoidable.

Mao Zedong rightly said, "War is politics with bloodshed and politics is war without bloodshed." Now, we have come to the stage of political negotiations. Just as our

fighting is principle-based, so also our negotiation is principle-based: Any solution that betrays the principle is not a solution. Rest assured that the NSCN will never enter into any agreement against the will of the Naga people nor will it take any decision at the expense of the Naga people's rights.

In the beginning, the Government of India projected the Indo-Naga political conflict in international communities as a domestic problem of India; which was false. It was an attempt to distort Naga history; it was a case of Indian armed invasion of Nagalim The Government of India, too, realising the futility of armed suppression, decided to seek political solution through a peace process under three conditions:

- Talks without any condition;
- Talks at the Prime Minister's level and
- Talks in a third country.

This shift in the Government of India's policy from a military solution to a political one is a realistic approach to the issue which should be appreciated; it shows the change of mindset of the Indian leaders from negative to positive. Naga people would be wise to seize this opportunity for finding an amicable solution.

The Government of India's recognition of the unique history and situation of the Nagas is a great progress in the peace process and it speaks volumes. The peace process is on the right track. But we should always be prepared to face any eventuality.

In the past it was: "Nothing to do with India and Burma; nothing short of total sovereignty and so on." We believe in the truth of inter-dependence of peoples and nations. No country exists in isolation. Nagalim cannot live in isolation from its neighbouring countries. Nagas have to depend on their neighbours and their neighbours on the Nagas for peace and prosperity. Let me re-assert: "Sovereignty of the Naga people belongs to the Naga people." But there is no total sovereignty on earth except the Sovereignty of God.

Even the USA, the only super power today, is politically and economically dependent on many countries for survival and development.

02 APR 2005

THE STATESMAN

Ulfa arms deal with Nepal Maoists keeps Assam govt on its toes

Bikash Singh

GUWAHATI 17 MARCH

THE reports of an arms deal between the proscribed militant outfit United Liberation Front of Assam (Ulfa) and the Maoists of Nepal have sent the security agencies of Assam into a tizzy. The intelligence agencies here have specific reports of the arms deal between the Ulfa and the Maoists. These agencies, however, felt that Ulfa's arms deal with the Maoists is a part of its new role of international arms supplier.

The Ulfa has supplied arms to several militant outfits including the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), another militant outfit of Assam, which is now under cease-fire with the government, and Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), which is active in North Bengal. The ultras of Manipur and Nagaland, at times, had entered into arms deals with the Ulfa.

A senior official in the special branch of the Assam Police, on the condition of anonymity, told ET that the Ulfa is evolving itself as an international arms supplier, supplying arms to outfits both within the North East and outside the region. "Previously, it was only supplying arms to the local outfits of the North East but now it has gone international and has entered into a diplomatic

relationship with the Maoists of Nepal," he said.

The official further said that Ulfa's bonhomie with the Maoists is not due to any ideological inclination. This deal is purely commercial and provides a lot of money to the Ulfa. "Recently, Ulfa has got hold of some very lethal and sophisticated arms like high order explosives called pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN) or penthrite (PNT), timer delay programme device, TNT, RDX, besides an RDX-PETN blend and dynamite. The delayed timer device can be placed underground four to five days before the target date," he said.

He added that more explosives were being used by the Ulfa after the Royal Bhutanese Army's operation against the Ulfa in 2003 on its camps on Bhutan.

Ulfa does not possess the requisite cadres to engage in gun battles with security forces. Now, it has in its camp explosive experts trained in Pakistan.

These experts have joined the Ulfa camp in 2003. "This year there have been more than 40 bomb blast in the state. Out of this, the Ulfa has owned responsibility in nearly 35 cases. The ISI is supplying explosives to the Ulfa. "It is happy selling guns and other artillery equipment to the outfits like Maoists as it does not require them," he said.

Sikkim govt told to skip border trekking routes

Our Correspondent

GANGTOK 17 MARCH

THE Union home ministry has given instructions to the Sikkim government to avoid all Indo-Nepal border area trekking route due to the present unrest in Nepal kingdom. After getting such instructions the state home department has directed all tour operators to avoid the stretches of the Singalila-Dzongri route that passes through Pare Megu of Nepal. Mostly trekkers use the Pare Megu for setting up camps at night.

According to the tourism secretary Alok Srivastav, they have already conveyed this to the Travel Agents Association of Sikkim (TAAS) that this route has been temporarily closed.

The closure of the route which begins from Uttarey to Dzongri a most popular destination of the foreign trekkers has definitely affected the business of travel agents. However, TAAS has marked out an alternative route from Dhar, avoiding the international border.

Boundary blues

NSCN-IM demand heightens tensions

By now the North-east states would have been wise enough to realise the danger inherent in leaving their border disputes unresolved. If one envisages an entire region as one entity the seven states must display a sense of urgency since tensions along borders cannot be kept under check through temporary truces. The Centre wants disputes settled through mutual negotiations but how can this come about when not one state is prepared to compromise on its stand? Nagaland refuses to accept the KVK Sundaram Commission report and claims large chunks of Assam's forests on the plea that the British separated these for administrative purposes. Arunachal Pradesh wants the return of 3,000 sq km of its territory merged with Assam following the 1951 Notification. Meghalaya does not accept the Justice Chandrachud Committee recommendations but is said to agree with Assam on a decision based on the demographic composition of border villages, but there is little progress. Nagaland and Manipur are at loggerheads over some areas in Djukuo valley.

Assam's suits against Arunachal and Nagaland are being heard by the Supreme Court and Dispur prefers to accept the court's decision rather than the Union home ministry's precondition that findings of a proposed boundary commission should be binding on all parties. Dispur contends that the home ministry's term was "improper" when the apex court was "reviewing" the matter. Indeed, the situation along the Assam-Nagaland boundary has been further complicated by NSCN(IM)'s assertiveness on the Greater Nagaland issue and this should serve as a warning of impending clashes as happened in 1979 and 1985 when the police personnel of both states fought a "virtual war" with sophisticated weapons. Until some workable formula is found, the contending states must take appropriate steps to prevent any breach of peace.

'Wicked people & fools can't take over'

Sanjoy Hazarika in New Delhi

March 15. — Mr T Muivah gives credit to the BJP-led government which acknowledged after five years of hard negotiations that the Nagas had a "unique history".

"Problems can be solved when all of us are rational, assessments can be made and futures decided; it is inevitable that we have to live as neighbours," he said. But when it was pointed out that the Naga view could also be regarded as one-sided and unprepared to concede the positions of others, he was quick to respond: "We do not claim any land belonging to the Meiteis; there is talk of democracy and people's will but nothing of the kind is applied when an issue arises in this part of the world."

Sources from both sides associated in the talks say that three tough negotiating points remain: the most difficult being that of territorial integration. Then there's joint defence (and the continuing presence of a Naga Army) and the issue of India maintaining primacy in external affairs but Nagas also being represented on issues con-



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cerning them. Indian negotiators speak with a mix of admiration and frustration at the Naga leadership for continuing to press their demands: "We are still at an early stage," said a government negotiator, after seven years of discussions and three months of more intensive talks! Other points such as a separate flag and nomenclature for various posts and institutions are not regarded by either side as a problem.

One of the stumbling blocks last year which delayed the Naga delegation's visit to India was the phrase in the common minimum

programme of the ruling UPA which spoke of the inviolable borders of the North-east. This was not being imposed on the talks, Mr Muivah clarified, because the Naga side had made it clear that it would "go away as we will not accept an arbitrary attitude."

Looking to the future, Mr Muivah said that "past history cannot be always the basis for solutions ... in many cases, it has to be on present conditions," again stressing the need for realism on all sides. He emphasised that rival Naga factions need to ask the forgiveness of the Naga people for their mistakes, a reference to the rump Naga National Council (whose main leader, Adinno Phizo, is in London) which launched the Naga independence movement and the NSCN of SS Khaplang, who lives in Myanmar. "They must say sorry, not to us but to the people ... and we will tell the people to accept this."

Civil society leaders in Nagaland need to stick to the stand that the political process of negotiations and reconciliation as well as efforts for unity must go together, he added. "This has to be issue-based... it cannot simply be a situa-

tion of replication. Nelson Mandela worked for South Africa - but Nagaland is not South Africa - you cannot apply philosophy mechanically, one has to be realistic. "The objectivity of the situation decides the political means to be adopted," he said. "You don't break a huge boulder with a pair of scissors and you do not take a hammer to a piece of paper. I do not believe in leaving the playing field and leaving it open for wicked people and fools to take over... the initiative must remain with us, and we will never let go," he declared.

Mr Muivah is tough; he's unprepared to budge on basic issues affecting the Nagas. But he is also now prepared to extend the hand of cordial discussion to neighbours, because he understands that the political logic and realism that he has embraced is forcing that situation. It is with them that they must live and prosper together. Politicians and civil society leaders need to respond - not merely from Delhi, but from the North-east where these core issues must eventually be resolved on the ground, peacefully and in partnership. **(Concluded)**

Mountain warrior prepares for battle in the plains

Sanjoy Hazarika in New Delhi

March 14. — Mr Thiuengelang Muivah smiled at the thought: "Lord of the mountain ranges," he said out loud, savouring the idea. "I love being in the jungle," declared the man who has been the principal negotiator of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim over these past years with the Government of India.

After seven years of cease-fire and negotiations, as Mr Muivah, one of South Asia's most doughty jungle warriors and resolute political figures, prepared for another round of political talks this week with the GoM (Group of Ministers) appointed to discuss issues related to the Naga imbroglio, he gave his first extensive interview to The Statesman at the sprawling bungalow in Luyten's Delhi where he has been lodged by the government.

Clad in blue jeans, beige shirt and a pair of loafers, Mr Muivah spoke in between endless sips of his favourite jasmine tea. He comes across as a man absolutely committed to bringing about a solution that is just, durable and honourable to the Nagas. And the words which figured time and again in the conversation with the man were "rationality", "reality" and "practical politics".

Quick with repartee and strong in asserting his viewpoint, Mr Muivah declared that the Nagas did not want the lands of others but their own traditional lands, which the British and then New Delhi had "given away".

He added that he had recently told Naga civil society groups that the Nagas recognised that different ethnic groups lived around them and "if they desire to live together with us they are most welcome".



MUIVAH INTERVIEW - I

Mr Muivah sought to portray himself as not just a man with a mission, but a tough negotiator albeit one prepared for further dialogue with neighbours.

He was tough on the United Liberation Front of Asom's attacks on innocent people, and especially school children, last year: "That is against humanity. What purpose do such attacks serve?"

In what can be seen as a move aimed at easing the emotions raised by the Naga demand for a unified homeland with chunks of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, Mr Muivah declared: "Nagas will never impose anything on them, they

'Manipur hill areas separation inevitable'

NEW DELHI, March 14. — Mr Muivah, now 69, says he believes that Assamese, Nagas and Meiteis must talk to dispel misunderstandings. But he's critical of the Meiteis, the valley people of Manipur who have an ancient history, saying that the Nagas cannot live according to the former's "whims". And he's tough on the lack of development in Manipur's hill region (where most Nagas live). "For how many years can the hill people tolerate being neglected and exploited like this," declaring that the separation of the hill areas was "inevitable." Mr Muivah said he would not be pressurised by claims, which he termed "irrational and irresponsible." — SNS

have to take a decision by themselves and if they decide to live with us we will never impose...we will respect their culture and traditions."

But he was also clear that the Naga demands were justified and could not be brushed aside, either by the states concerned or by New Delhi. "Do they mean," he said, referring to the position of the three other states opposing the Naga demand, "that we were never there? A unified (Naga) government may not have been there but the existence of village and tribal governments cannot be denied."

Then Mr Muivah asserted one of the basic principles of his political philosophy: "People are with the land: Nation, politics, land and people cannot be separated. The issue can't be seen from a Delhi perspective without understanding the Naga view."

(To be concluded)

প্রত্যাশিত প্রত্যাবর্তন

ত্রিপুরার স্বশাসিত জেলা পরিষদের নির্বাচনে আঠাশটি আসনের মধ্যে সব কয়টিই বামফ্রন্টের দখলে যাওয়ার মধ্যে অপ্রত্যাশিত কিছু নাই। বিরোধী পক্ষ কংগ্রেস, টি ইউ জে এস ও আই এন পি টি একটিও আসন পায় নাই। বিরোধীদের মধ্যে কোনও আসন-রফা হয় নাই। কংগ্রেস একাই অর্ধেক আসন দাবি করায় পরিষদের বিদায়ী শাসক গোষ্ঠী আই এন পি টির সহিত তাহার কোনও বোঝাপড়া হইতে পারে নাই। অথচ আই এন পি টি ভূমিপুত্র তথা জনজাতীয়দের নামে দল গঠন করিলেও সন্তোষজনক প্রশাসন উপহার দিতে পারে নাই। বস্তুত, ২০০০ সালের পরিষদ নির্বাচন যদি অবাধ হইত, যদি এন এল এফ টির সশস্ত্র জঙ্গিরা সন্ত্রাস সৃষ্টি করিয়া অন্যান্য দলকে অংশগ্রহণে নিবৃত্ত না করিত এবং বামপন্থী প্রার্থীদের অপহরণ বা খুন করিয়া ভোটগ্রহণের গোটা পরিবেশটিকে দূষিত, বিকৃত করিয়া না তোলা হইত, তবে সে বারের ফলাফলও এ বারের কাছাকাছি হইবার সম্ভাবনা ছিল। জঙ্গিদের প্রত্যক্ষ সাহায্য বা পরোক্ষ সমর্থন লইয়া দেশের অন্যান্য প্রান্তেও নির্বাচনে বিভিন্ন দলকে ভাল ফল করিতে দেখা গিয়াছে। অসমে আলফা এবং বিহার ও অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশে নকশাল জঙ্গিরা নানা সময়ে বিভিন্ন দলকে ভোট দিতে অনুগামী-সমর্থকদের প্ররোচিত করিয়াছে। ত্রিপুরায় জঙ্গিরা পরে কোণঠাসা হইয়া পড়ায় তাহাদের সমর্থিত দলের জয়ের সম্ভাবনাও হ্রাস পায়। সেই সঙ্গে ছিল আই এন পি টির পারিষদদের ব্যাপক দুর্নীতি, অকর্মণ্যতা, পাঁচ বছরে ছয় বার ভারপ্রাপ্ত কার্যনির্বাহী সদস্যকে বদল করার অস্থিরতা বা বিশৃঙ্খলা। ত্রিপুরি জনজাতির এই জনাদেশ স্বাভাবিক নয় কি?

ত্রিপুরার স্বশাসিত জেলা পরিষদ রাজ্যের একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ রাজনৈতিক-প্রশাসনিক একক। রাজ্যের দশ লক্ষ বর্গ কিলোমিটার আয়তনের সাত লক্ষ বর্গ কিলোমিটারই এই পরিষদের এজিয়ারভুক্ত। একত্রিশ লক্ষ জনসংখ্যার এগারো লক্ষ জনজাতীয় বাসিন্দাও পরিষদের সীমানাতেই বাস করেন। বাঙালি অভিবাসী প্লাবিত এই পার্বত্য ও অরণ্যসঙ্কল প্রান্তপ্রদেশে জনজাতি বনাম অভিবাসীদের দ্বন্দ্ব ১৯৭৯ সালের মে এবং ৮০ সালের জুন মাসে দুই দফায় যে রক্তাক্ত জাতিদাঙ্গার জন্ম দেয়, তাহার প্রেক্ষিতেই জনজাতীয় স্বাধিকার সুনিশ্চিত করিতে স্বশাসিত জেলা পরিষদ গঠন করা হয়। অতঃপর দফায়-দফায় সংবিধান সংশোধন করিয়া পরিষদকে বিভিন্ন তফসিলের অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিয়া তাহার এজিয়ার ও ক্ষমতার সীমা প্রসারিত করা হইয়াছে। সি পি আই এমের নেতৃত্বাধীন বামপন্থীরা একদা জনজাতীয় ক্ষমতায়নের আন্দোলনের মাধ্যমে রাজ্যের গুরুত্বপূর্ণ রাজনৈতিক শক্তি হইয়া উঠিলেও পরে বাঙালি-ত্রিপুরি দ্বন্দ্ব বাঙালির পার্টি রূপে শনাক্ত হইতে থাকেন। এই পর্বেই জনজাতিদের সংগঠন টি ইউ জে এস কংগ্রেসের সহিত জোটবদ্ধ হইয়া বামপন্থীদের সামনে রাজনৈতিক চ্যালেঞ্জ তৈয়ার করিয়াছিল। পরে জনজাতীয় নেতাদের দলে বিশেষ স্থান করিয়া দিয়া এবং ভূমিপুত্রদের আত্মশাসনের সীমানা প্রসারিত করিতে সচেতন প্রচেষ্টা চালাইয়া বামপন্থীরা ত্রিপুরিদের মন জয় করেন। সেই হইতে বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদী জনজাতীয়রা সময়ে-সময়ে নিতান্তন জনজি গোষ্ঠী গড়িয়া বামপন্থীদের শাসনে অন্তর্ঘাত করিলেও মোটের উপর জনজাতিরা রাজনৈতিক স্থায়িত্ব ও অর্থনৈতিক উন্নয়নের স্বার্থে বামেদেরই উপর্যুপরি নির্বাচনে জিতাইয়া চলিয়াছেন। ২০০০ সালের নির্বাচনটি সেই ধারায় এক ব্যতিক্রমী ছেদ ছিল। তবে সেই ছেদটি গণতান্ত্রিক পদ্ধতিতে ঘটানো হয় নাই। পাঁচ বছর পরিষদ চালাইবার সুযোগ পাইয়াও জনজাতীয়দের তথাকথিত নিজস্ব সংগঠন আই এন পি টি দুর্নীতি ও অন্তর্কলহে ব্যাপ্ত থাকিয়াছে। পরিষদের শাসনক্ষমতায় বামপন্থীদের প্রত্যাবর্তন তাই স্বাভাবিকই ছিল। এ জন্যই বৈজ্ঞানিক কারচুপির অভিযোগকে নির্বাচন কমিশন পাত্তা দেয় নাই, ৩১৪টি বুথে পুনর্নির্বাচনের দাবিও গ্রাহ্য হয় নাই।

AAJKAL

12 MAR 2005

Those involved in the peace process should remember that the situation in Manipur is worse than what it is in Jammu and Kashmir on account of apathy and mismanagement

APATHY HITS MANIPUR

By JR MUKHERJEE

MANIPUR is a beautiful valley which sits astride the Patkai, Naga and Manipur Hill Ranges. It has Nagaland to the north, Myanmar to the east, Mizoram to the south and Assam to the west. It has a 2001 census population of 23,88,634. Its demographic profile is: Naga Tribes — Ao, Kabui, Angami, Zeliang, Khongazai, Mao, Tangkhul — 13 per cent; Kuki-Chin — Anal, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Koira, Kom, Lamgang, Mizo, Mansang, Paite, Ralte, Sahte, Simte, Thadou, Vaiphei, Zou — 14 per cent; Meitei — 58 per cent; Others — 15 per cent (including Muslims).

Manipur has an inter-ethnic conflict between the Meitei (Manipuri) and Naga tribes; Kuki-Chin tribals versus both the Nagas and the Meiteis; demands for Greater Nagaland and Mizoram; valley (Meitei) versus hill inhabitants. This is because of political, social, geographic, historical and economic instability resulting from fragmentation of the society owing to maladministration and neglect.

Historically, the Meiteis have ruled the state for a long period — their kingdom reportedly stretched from River Brahmaputra in the north to River Chindwin to the south. The Manipur plains are the core and the surrounding hills the fringe regions. Hill tribes were permitted local autonomy subject to their maintaining peace and giving tribute to kings of Manipur. After Aryan migrations into Bengal, the Meiteis were strongly influenced by Hinduism and Vedic culture. In the 16th century they adopted Vaishnavism and had become a power in the region along with the Bodo Kacharis who ruled from Dimapur, Mughals who ruled Bengal, Tripuris and Ahoms. From then onwards, they were subjected to repeated Burmese invasions. The power struggle with other powers of the region also took its toll. The Manipuri population was decimated and economy disrupted. Consequently, they were neither able to keep the hill tribes

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under control, nor keep the invading Myanmar hordes at bay. In 1824 they appealed to the British for help. The British defeated the Burmese, but forced Manipur to cede the Burmese the rich Kabaw Valley. The British also instigated massive migrations of Kuki-Chin-Mizo tribes, to act as a buffer between the Nagas and their plantations in the Cachar.

Relations between the British and Manipuris deteriorated leading to the 1891 Anglo-Mani-

cluding the ceding of the Kabaw Valley to Burma and granting only Union Territory status to Manipur when Nagaland was granted statehood. When counter-insurgency operations were launched by the Security Forces, many groups moved out to the Cittaog Hill Tracts. Owing to rising unemployment, the situation worsened and complicated political equations emerged. Increasing frustration, corrupt and poor governance, the continuing feud between the

Pakistani and Bangladesh intelligence tried to get all insurgent groups to join hands



pur war and British annexation of the state. There was political awakening and participation in India's freedom struggle with many Meiteis supporting the Japanese and joining the Indian National Army against the British. After Partition, the Maharaja of Manipur acceded to the Indian Union, which gave cause to some Naga and Meitei groups for insurgency. The newly created Manipur Communist Party reached an understanding with Myanmar Communists, who had control over adjoining areas in Myanmar, to cede the Kabaw Valley back to Manipur. In the 50s and 60s, some Manipur Naga tribals joined the Naga movement. Meitei Communists tied up with Myanmar Communists and some Kumi-Chin tribals joined their counterparts in Chin and Mizo Hills to wage insurgency and engage in inter-ethnic depredations for control of the area and lucrative trans-border drug and other trade.

By the 60s and 70s, Meitei insurgent groups demanded revival of pre-Vaishnav Meitei culture and secession from India. They agitated over neglect, in-

groups and support from Pakistan and Bangladesh resulted in revival of insurgency by the 80s and 90s. To add to the complexities, Pakistani and Bangladesh intelligence tried to get all insurgent groups to join hands.

The Naga insurgents in Manipur are led by Muivah's Tangkhuls, NSCN(I&M) which emerged from a split in the NSCN in 87-88; and who have now more or less gained control of most Naga areas in Manipur and adjoining states.

Besides secession, their demand is for merger of Naga tribal areas of Manipur, Assam, Arunachal and Myanmar with Nagaland, which is one of the reasons for conflict with the Meiteis. Their conflict with the Kukis is for control over drug and other traffic into Myanmar, besides the forcible interjection of the Kukis into traditional Naga areas.

The Meitei-Kuki conflict is based on forcible occupation of Meitei areas, the demand for Greater Mizoram encompassing all areas occupied by their ethnic groups in Manipur, South Assam and Chin Hills and

control over trade in South Manipur. The Kukis have been alienated on the grounds that they were settled in these areas by the British and it was the duty of the government to protect them. They supported the Mizo insurgency in the 60s and 70s. They have now organised insurgent groups, whose role is to strike back at depredations against them and try to achieve amalgamation with Mizoram and Chin Hills.

After the NSCN (I&M) ceasefire came into vogue, the NSCN's attempt was to get it extended to cover the entire NSCN(I&M) claimed areas so that they could gain control of the area during the cease fire, notwithstanding the rivalry of some tribes with the Tangkhuls. Delhi initially gave their approval to this proposal. This led to widespread agitation and strife and Delhi was forced to retract. However, there is an unofficial ceasefire following which the NSCN(I&M) has had a free run, much to the chagrin of the Meiteis, the Kuki-Chins, the people in NSCN(I&M) claimed areas and the state governments.

As a result of intense counter-insurgency operations in Manipur, many groups have shifted their sanctuaries to Myanmar, Bangladesh and adjoining states. The Meitei insurgent over-ground elements have launched a sustained campaign to malign the SF, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act.

There is also a strong nexus between the insurgents and some politicians. Further, owing to inter-ethnic animosity, there is lack of development in the hill districts and a great deal of social deprivation which, in turn, contributes further to the ethnic divide.

In a nutshell, the situation in Manipur is acute — much worse than in Jammu and Kashmir and it is deteriorating further owing to apathy and mismanagement. Looking at Manipur in isolation would in all probability lead to a faulty analysis as has happened in the past. Those involved in the peace process with the NSCN(I&M) and policy making should consider these facts while trying to broker a deal.

27 FEB 2005

Those involved in policy formulation on Nagaland need to realise that coming to an agreement with the Tangkhuls will be unacceptable to the vast majority

COMPLEX NAGA PUZZLE

5-8 2012 By JR MUKHERJEE 9/12/87

NAGALAND lies astride the Patkai and Naga Hills ranges. It has Arunachal and Assam to its north, Myanmar to its east, Manipur to its south and Assam to its west. It has about 20 resident tribes (14 major), together called Nagas. As per the 2001 census, the population is 19,88,636. The approximate tribal break-up is — Angami nine per cent, Ao 15 per cent, Chakesang eight per cent, Chang two per cent, Khiammung two per cent, Konyak 15 per cent, Lotha seven per cent, Phom three per cent, Rengma 1.5 per cent, Makware 0.5 per cent, Sangtam four per cent, Sema 13 per cent, Tikhir 0.5 per cent, Yimchunger two per cent, Zeliang two per cent, Garos one per cent, Chir/BodoKachari/Kuki/Mikir/others 16 per cent.

The origin of the term Naga is obscure — it is used to identify tribes living in the Naga Hills. Nagaland has no recorded history other than that recorded by the British and the Ahom Chronicles, and passing references in Hindu epics. Folklore and anthropological studies indicate the tribes migrated from the general area of Yunnan before the birth of Christ. Each of these tribes settled into separate areas in the Naga Hills and have throughout been antagonistic to and fought with each other.

These tribes are ethnically, culturally and ideologically distinct from valley people and in most cases from each other. They enjoyed tribal autonomy and any threat to this invited violent reaction. The Ahoms, Mughals, Manipuris, Burmese and the British found it expensive to subjugate them. They, therefore, entered into agreements with various tribes to maintain peace by allowing them autonomy. Till the 19th century, their beliefs were primordial and animistic.

The sudden transition from tradition to modernity, irrespective of westernisation, has caught them off-guard. There is also the issue of looking and feeling different. Under British rule they were allowed local autonomy and the inner line policy to keep them away from

political awakening. The British tried to civilise them through conversion to Christianity and Western values and culture. The effect was to partially weld them together.

Christianity meant literacy — to be able to read scriptures and adopt Western dress and lifestyles. This led to political awakening which, coupled with exposure to world wars, collapse of the British Empire, partition of the subcontinent, British proposals to reconstitute the hill dis-

tricts as a Crown Colony and a successful guerrilla war against the Japanese further politicised them and reinforced demands for independence. India's independence threatened loss of their culture, values and traditional administrative institutions. The Nagas, therefore, agitated against it. The new Indian leadership decided to continue with the British policy of administration, i.e. autonomy and segregation. This only strengthened their resolve for autonomy, alienated them, prevented their assimilation into the mainstream, reinforced their feeling of being different and superior to plains people and facilitated interaction with their brethren in Myanmar who had taken up arms against the Burmese Government with similar demands. Maladministration and lack of development and the attempt to enforce Assamese as the State language leading to a flood of Bangladeshi immigrants reinforced their fears. This led to insurgency and deployment of Security Forces (SF) in the State from the late 50s. The problem was aggravated by Chinese and Pakistani support to the movement. Efforts towards a resolution of the problem had its failures and successes in the 60s, including grant of statehood in 1963.

The administration gained a respite in the post-71 period, owing to successful counter-insurgency operations which forced hostile bands to flee to Myanmar and reduced Chinese support to insurgents. The respite was, however, short-lived owing to the coup and military rule in Bangladesh and renewed support from Pakistan, China

The period of the ceasefire has been used by people and the Church who are tired of violence to propagate peace with honour



and Bangladesh, the birth of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) out of the anti-accord factions; and adoption of a common cause with Myanmar insurgents. The 80s witnessed a power struggle between the two factions of the NSCN, i.e. the Issac & Muivah (I&M) and Khaplang (K) groups. There were also changes in the pattern of insurgency. NSCN (I&M)'s Pakistani mentors managed to convince them that success was feasible only if they operate jointly with other insurgent groups and their philosophy needs to change with a view to establishing a separate state. This led to NSCN (I&M) becoming the mother organisation to most insurgent groups in the north-east.

By the late 90s, owing to successful SF operations, NSCN (I&M) was forced out of Nagaland to bases in adjoining states and the countries where they received sanctuary. It was due to these operations and the public pressure that they were forced to ask for a ceasefire which has been in place since 1997. The ceasefire has led to both NSCN groups officially applying to Nagaland

since other state governments had refused to agree to demands for a Greater Nagaland with large chunks of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal.

It needs to be noted that almost the entire NSCN (I&M) leadership and at least 40 per cent of their cadres are from the Tangkhul tribe of the Nagas in Manipur and not Nagaland, with another 40 per cent being from other Manipuri, Assamese and Arunachali Naga tribes. Not more than 10 to 15 per cent or less of the cadres are from the Nagaland tribes because Naga tribes living outside Nagaland feel the majority communities in their home state are exploiting them. Many of the Nagaland Naga tribes, NSCN (K) and other groups view these talks with suspicion, distrust and scepticism, as they consider the Government of India negotiations with the I&M to be talks with the Tangkhuls who are not considered to Nagas and are trying to "lord it over them" by force of arms.

The period of the ceasefire has been used by people and the Church who are tired of violence to propagate peace with honour, and by the NSCN groups to strengthen themselves and eliminate their rivals. Elections have also been held and a new government is keen to make the ceasefire and the talks succeed. Due to the importance given to them, the I&M has more or less gained control over the entire state by force with the exception of the north-eastern part which remains under K control. While there are popular pressures for rapprochement of both groups, this is currently unlikely due to ethnic rivalry and blood feuds.

The NSCN (I&M)'s primary demands are amalgamation of all areas inhabited by Naga tribes, including areas in Manipur, Assam and Arunachal. Those involved in policy formulation and talks need to realise that coming to an agreement with only NSCN (I&M) will be seen as having done a deal with the Tangkhuls which may be unacceptable to the vast majority. Such an agreement is, therefore, unlikely to succeed. Due to public pressure, there has been relative peace in Nagaland for the past seven years. One can only hope that a lasting and acceptable solution will be found.

The author is a retired Lieutenant-General, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, of the Indian Army

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2005

GO FOR IT IN NAGALAND

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THE STATE HUMAN Development Report 2004 for Nagaland, the first for the State, is revealing in many respects. According to conventional wisdom, the decades-long insurgency, which has claimed thousands of lives, should have pulled the State down in every way. Quite to the contrary, Nagaland scores higher than the national average in several important areas, including life expectancy at birth, adult literacy, and per capita income. These are the three indicators that go into the computation of the Human Development Index, a concept formulated by Amartya Sen and Mahbub-ul-Haque in 1990 for a comprehensive measurement of development. The HDI for Nagaland is 0.62, which is significantly higher than India's 0.472. The State also scores better on the Gender Disparity Index, which compares human development between the sexes. These are commendable achievements and speak to the determination of the Naga people to overcome the political and development constraints that the insurgency placed on the State, on top of the challenge of geographical remoteness from the rest of the country. The report credits these strides in development to the "social capital" stemming out of traditional village institutions and the unique framework of gender relations among the Naga people. The survival of these institutions and practices in the midst of conflict is by itself a matter for celebration.

On the basis of its HDI, Nagaland ranks 11 among all Indian States. But there are several gaps in its development, most notably in the areas of infrastructure and industrial growth. The report also makes the point that notwithstanding the high literacy rate, the quality of education has declined. Of serious concern is the high rate of unemployment among educated youth. Rightly, the report places emphasis on lasting peace as an essential requirement for the future development of the State. Released at the end of January, the report could not have come at a better time. Over

the past two months, the peace process between the Centre and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah), the group at the forefront of the insurgency, has reached a significant stage. The two sides have conducted several rounds of talks since mid-January in New Delhi in an attempt to make a breakthrough in the peace process that began with the declaration of a ceasefire in 1997. The truce with the NSCN (I-M) and the ceasefire agreement signed subsequently with the Kaplang faction in 2001, did not just silence the guns in the State. They have created a yearning for a permanent peace through a negotiated political settlement of all the issues at stake in Nagaland.

These positive developments should strengthen the hands of the NSCN (I-M) leadership and the Central Government as they continue their negotiations. Although very little concrete information is available on the progress made in these talks, it is clear that both sides are serious about the process; neither wants a slide back into bloodshed. The recent two-month visit by Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah to Nagaland — their first after three decades of self-exile abroad — during which they interacted with all sections of the Naga people, is of considerable importance. It is also significant that a declaration issued at the end of a consultation between various Naga representatives and the NSCN (I-M) leadership expressed support for "an honourable solution to the Indo-Naga political issue on the basis of the uniqueness of Naga history and situation," but did not mention sovereignty, one of their two key demands. Although it projected the other demand — the integration of all Naga areas in other parts of the North-East — as "non-negotiable," the current atmosphere presents the best possible opportunity ever for finding a just and honourable solution. The Naga leadership and the Central Government must put their best foot forward to seize the opportunity.

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19 FEB 2005

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Naga talks: the task ahead

By M.S. Prabhakara

Both the Government of India and the NSCN should move beyond the sterile formulas based on the territorial imperative.

India, N.B. States

ON THE face of it, the prospects for any satisfactory conclusion to the ongoing talks in New Delhi between the Centre and the leaders of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah), which the latter unflinchingly characterise as 'Indo-Naga Political Talks,' are dim.

Speaking at the fourth Naga People's Consultative Conference in Dimapur (the venue was named Hebron), the NSCN (I-M) general secretary, Thuingaleng Muivah, appeared quite prepared for the talks to break down if, as he put it, New Delhi continued to be intransigent on the NSCN's core demands: Naga sovereignty and the integration of the Naga areas presently outside Nagaland into one territorial unit. "Bhangile Bhangibo" (if the talks break down, so be it), he said, underlining in his use of the Assamese idiom both the similarities and contradictions between the Naga and the Assamese nationalistic assertions.

But this all-or-nothing approach need not be the last word. Both the Centre and the NSCN leaders, even while approaching the problem from different perspectives, need to find a solution; though the task they have set for themselves appears impossible, like squaring the circle.

The present dialogue, strictly speaking, is yet to begin; the seemingly endless preliminaries are continuing. Returning to New Delhi on January 30 after a six-week sojourn in Nagaland for "consultations with Naga people and Naga civil society," their first publicly known visit in several decades, the NSCN leaders held three rounds of talks (February 3, 4, 10) as well as a brief meeting with the Prime Minister on February 9.

The NSCN chairman, Isak Chishi Swu, did not attend the first round of talks and has indeed not taken part in any of the subsequent meetings, barring the brief meeting with the Prime Minister on February 9, which he attended more probably for reasons of 'protocol' than anything else. There are also reports that he is returning briefly to Amsterdam, apparently to renew his residence permit, though one should also bear in mind that the Naga International Support Centre, a structure that has systematically mobilised international support for the NSCN, is also based in Amsterdam.

The session the following day between the Group of Ministers and a delegation of the NSCN was supposed to mark the beginning of "substantive talks." However nothing like that seems to have happened, with the NSCN leaders reiterating their desire to have the Prime Minister

lead the Central delegation. Thus the brief meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, during which he is reported to have reiterated the Government's seriousness in finding a peaceful solution that should be both "honourable" and should "respect the dignity of the Naga people" — the two components of any formula that may be forthcoming.

Given the history of the prolonged negotiations with the leaders of Naga nationalist assertion that were marked by several culminations, leading to understandings, agreements and accords such as the pre-Independence Nine-Point Understanding of June 1947, the 16-Point Agreement of July 1960, and the Shillong Accord of November 1975, the pace of the current talks is to be expected. Much of the preliminary ground should have been cleared during the several rounds of 'talks about talks' in various foreign locations between the NSCN leaders and several facilitators, interlocutors and other Government functionaries.

The stakes are high. Hence, the seemingly endless preliminaries, the excruciating attention to details, the checking and rechecking of every word, every nuance.

What are these stakes? The words, "territorial integrity" and "within the framework of the Indian Constitution" are, for the Government of India, the bottom line — the two imperatives on which there can be no any compromise. In a curious way, these are also the imperatives of the NSCN, as is evident from the Declaration it adopted at the end of the two-day Naga Consultative Conference held last month (January 20-21) in Dimapur, and the core of the mandate that the NSCN leaders have brought to New Delhi, though the issue of Naga sovereignty is not explicitly spelt out:

"The Naga peoples and organizations covering across the length and breadth of the Naga Homeland after two days of intensive, sincere and honest interaction with the Collective Leadership of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland declare:

"1. The fullest support for an honourable solution to the Indo-Naga political issue on the basis of the uniqueness of Naga History and situation; 2. That the unification of the Naga areas is legitimate and therefore non-negotiable; 3. That the political solution should be found through peaceful means; and 4. That

both [the] Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland uphold utmost honesty and sincerity towards finding a political solution."

The closest that the declaration comes to asserting Naga sovereignty and Naga nationhood is the reference to the "uniqueness of Naga history and situation." This is a far cry from the standard reiteration of the "inalienable rights of the Naga people for self-determination." But then, this is also consistent with the NSCN's view that the Naga people have never "demanded independence." Rather, what is at issue, "the uniqueness of Naga history and situation," is that the Naga people declared their independence a day before India became formally free; and so the only thing that remains to be sorted out in these political talks is the restoration of that independence, concomitantly with the withdrawal of the 'Indian occupation forces' from the Naga territory.

In other words, without ever resiling from its determination to restore Naga sovereignty, the NSCN leaders have for the present chosen not to make that an issue and instead taken the incremental approach to resolve what may be describes as the 'Naga National Question' that by definition also includes the Naga territorial imperative. Thus the mandate: "The unification of the Naga areas is legitimate and therefore non-negotiable." It is significant that the issue of Naga sovereignty, *at present*, has not merited such unqualified assertion, indeed, not even a direct mention, as that of territoriality.

The impediments in the way of making any concessions on the issue of "Naga areas integration" are well known. Both the Understanding of July 1947 (Clause 6) and the Agreement of July 1960 (Clause 13) refer to the issue of Naga areas integration. But these commitments (in the latter case, merely noted for record as the views of the Naga delegation) were made when the area under discussion was Naga Hills-Tuensang Area (NHTA), then a district of the State of Assam, and the envisaged transfers, if implemented, would have meant little more than the redrawing of the boundaries of the districts of a State.

The emergence of Manipur (January 1972) and Arunachal Pradesh (February 1987) as separate States has made the issue even more complicated, especially since the Mani-

puri nationalistic assertion, with a recorded history of triumphs, defeats and national humiliations dating back to several centuries, is something that one can tamper with only at one's peril. This is especially so since the Manipuri nationalistic assertion continues to manifest itself, in its extreme forms, as a desire to regain its lost independence and sovereignty or, at the very least, a renegotiation of the terms of the merger of the Kingdom of Manipur into the Indian Union under what it sees as dubious circumstances.

And yet, indeed perhaps because of these very factors, those engaged in the talks simply cannot afford for them to flounder, for the heavy political and ideological investments of the last decade or so to go down the drain. "A decade ago, we considered India our enemy; now we do not think so." "We understand the problems of the Government of India. The Government of India too should understand our problems ..." Such statements by NSCN leaders go beyond what they say.

So how does one then tackle the issue of the territorial imperative? Could a beginning be made by clearly identifying the Naga-inhabited areas and, by a suitable amendment to the Constitution, and the consent of the people involved on all sides, bring them under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule presently not applicable either to Manipur or Arunachal Pradesh, and enable the formation of autonomous district councils or regional councils? The emerging structures could then negotiate their linkages with the present state of Nagaland, or the putative Nagalim (which has the same meaning as Nagaland) enabling both the consolidation of the Naga identity and protecting the very same identity of the Naga people presently outside the State of Nagaland, who, over the centuries have absorbed other, even if cognate, characteristics, share a different cultural universe. As a correspondent in Manipur once argued with this writer, what has an Anal Naga in Tengnoupal district in Manipur (who anyway did not even view himself or herself as a Naga a generation ago) in common with a Konyak in Tirap in Arunachal Pradesh, except the constructed Naga identity, even allowing that this construction is based on shared myths, legends and memories of suffering and pain?

Above all, both the Government of India and the NSCN have to move beyond the sterile formulas based on the territorial imperative. Else, the talks will once again be little more than going round in circles.

Isak away, Muivah to be face of NSCN at talks

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 14

THE NSCN (I-M) general secretary, Thuingaleng Muivah, will represent the Naga people alone at the next round of the peace dialogue with the Centre on Wednesday. The outfit's president, Isak Chisi Swu, left for Amsterdam today.

Earlier today, Swu and Muivah had met Leader of the Opposition L.K. Advani. The meeting has been described as a courtesy call.

"It was a goodwill gesture. Nothing related to the peace talks were discussed," officials said after the meeting.

The Indian ministerial delegation, it is understood, has made an initial statement on the issue of integration of Naga-inhabited areas, which has been a key demand of the Naga outfit.

Centre has highlighted opposition from other N-E states to the integration of Naga-inhabited areas, a key demand of the outfit

The Centre, it is understood, has highlighted the strong opposition from neighbouring states like Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh on any redivision of territory and its likely repercussions in the Northeastern part of the

country if the Naga demand is accommodated by the Government.

However, the Naga delegation has been assured that the Government is keen that the unique cultural and religious identity of the people of Nagaland is preserved.

According to Home Ministry officials, special packages to preserve the culture and religious identity of the Nagas and promote Nagaland could be a means out of the bind and solution to the problem.

Sources told *The Indian Express*: "The Naga leaders also appreciate the problems that come in the way of integration of Naga-inhabited areas". In fact, the NSCN(I-M) leaders, in their initial statement, had also said that while they appreciate the difficulties of the Centre, it expected the Government to be sensitive to the Nagas.

INDIAN EXPRESS 15 FEB 2005

Naga "social capital" intact despite challenges: report

By Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI, FEB. 13. Though confronted with constraints and challenges in politics, economics, geographical terrain and a long-drawn insurgency, the "social capital" and resilience of the Naga village communities have remained intact and are beginning to help overcome several other difficulties.

"The village councils, village development boards and the recently introduced Communitisation of Public Institutions and Services Act, 2002, in areas such as education, health, power which have already been acknowledged as successful, are a case in point," says the recently-launched first Nagaland State Human Development Report (NSHDR).

The report also looks at the evolution and status of governance system in the State and its impact on development. The status of women is looked at through the lens of education, health and income and livelihood. The report discusses the human development indices and millennium development goals for Nagaland. An attempt has been made to provide a perspective for a developed State by 2020 and the report tries to identify the core strategies and programmes that will create a developed Nagaland.

Communitisation

A major strength that contemporary Naga society has inherited is the "social capital" that has stemmed out of traditional institutions and practices. There is a strong social bonding and community spirit and absence of caste and social discrimination. The Nagaland experience of communitisation is the first in the world.

"With the introduction of village council, the village development boards and communitisation of essential services in health, education, power, rural tourism, water supply, the Government is gradually reserving for itself the role of facilitator and enabler. With this, the "trickling down" concept of development had been effectively abandoned and it is hoped that there will be a "bubbling up" of development from the grassroots, which is equitable and suitable to the "unique concept of Nagaland," the report says.

Challenges

The development experience of Nagaland has been full of challenges. Apart from its late start, geographical remoteness and inaccessibility, hilly terrain, lack of infrastructure, population composition and scarce resource base, the State also had to face continuous insurgency, spending much of its resources on administration and related costs at the expense of development and denying itself the dividends of peace.

The report expresses concern over the increasing number of educated unemployed youth which, if not tackled effectively, could lead to vitiating the developmental environment. In recent years, there has also been a noticeable rise in under-employment and disguised unemployment.

Two measures taken at the political level have been declaration of 2004 as the Year of Youth Empowerment and the setting up of the Chief Minister's Corpus Fund to generate self-employment for jobless youth. The majority of the workforce is either in the rural areas or in the unorganised urban sector.

THE HINDU

14 FEB 2005

On ending the Naga war

By Sanjib Baruah

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THE following is an excerpt from Sanjib Baruah's latest book, *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*, published by Oxford University Press, India. The issues discussed are essential to understand the context in which the Naga peace talks are being held.

PROJECTS of nationhood frequently rely on censuses and other modern forms of enumeration and classification and a modern technology of representation – the map – in order to connect territoriality and collective selfhood. The notion of territorially rooted collectivities living in their supposedly traditional national homelands relies on a very different spatial discourse than the one of overlapping frontiers and hierarchical polities that precedes it.

In North-east India the historical relations between hill peoples and the lowland states had an especially complex spatial, cultural and political dynamic. As a result there is a serious collision between competing projects of identity assertion today.

The Naga desire for a homeland that would bring together all Nagas into one political unit can come into being only at the expense of Manipur, as well as Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Key to a political settlement is the recognition on the part of all parties that there is an inherent crisis of territoriality in North-east India. Such recognition, of course, will have to occur within the framework of a process that the Nagas can see as reconciliation, among themselves, with their neighbours and with the Indian government.

The Naga hills, where a multiplicity of cultural forms had historically reigned supreme are best seen as, what James C Scott terms, a non-state space – an “illegible space” from the perspective of the states in the lowlands. The ethnic landscape of the hills has always confused outsiders – states as well as ethnographers. The taxonomies about the hill peoples have been almost always wrong, groups identified as distinct were later found to be not “uniform, coherent, or stable through time”. Whether it was linguistic practice, dress, rituals, diet or body decoration, neat



boundary lines had been impossible to draw.

Such an unfamiliar and confusing ethnic landscape fits well with slash and burn agriculture – the common mode of livelihood in these hills – which means dispersed and mobile populations that could not be captured for corvee labour and military service by the labour-starved states of the plains; nor could tax-collectors monitor either the number of potential subjects or their holdings and income.

At the same time the non-state spaces in the hills and the state spaces in the lowlands had been anything but separate. Indeed the categories “hill tribes” and “valley peoples” are leaky vessels. People had continually moved from the hills to the plains and from the plains to the hills.

Since manpower was always in short supply, wars in this region were not about territory, but about capturing slaves. If wars produced movements in either direction, the attractions of commerce and what the lowlanders call civilisation may have generated a flow of hill peoples downwards. On the other hand, the extortionist labour demands of the lowland states and, the vulnerability of wet-rice cultivation to crop failure, epidemics

and famines produced flight to the hills where there were more subsistence alternatives.

The Manipuri protest of 2001 served to bring to light the history of the region's “strange multiplicity” and the tensions between the spatial discourse that had historically enabled the hill peoples and lowland states of the region to coexist and the spatial discourse of exclusive territorially rooted collectivities that frame today's politics of recognition.

It is doubtful if secret bilateral meetings between the Government of India and the rebel leaders will produce a solution. Manipur surely has as serious a stake as any in the Naga conflict. If it is not a

part of the way the Naga conflict is conventionally mapped, it is a function of how most observers have got accustomed to India's centralised style of governing and deciding the fate of this frontier region. At the same time it cannot be argued that the Naga talks can be suddenly expanded to include Manipur as a stakeholder. Before anything like that can happen, all parties would have to come to terms with the limits of the territorial discourse in North-east India that the

collision between the Naga and Manipuri projects of recognition underscores.

In North-east India we have come to the end of the road of territorial reorganisation of states. We need an alternative institutional imagination. A source of fresh ideas may be an entirely different political discourse than that of making and breaking states.

The principle of the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples under international law, for instance, has led to concepts like separate polities within shared territories, which have been tried in societies where relations between settlers and indigenous peoples are based on treaties between a government and particular indigenous nations.

Even if these parties had vastly asymmetric power relations when these treaties were signed, and for a long time such treaties did not protect these peoples against assimilative policies and practices, in recent years they have provided the basis for challenging the foundational myths of the national communities created by settler communities. But most significantly, slowly but steadily they are modifying the architecture of federalism in countries like Australia, Canada and the USA. The “native” peoples have been able to claim a place in the federal table alongside states.

Given the history of the past five decades, it would be too much to expect the Naga conflict to suddenly end on a whimper of some vague promise of cultural autonomy. A proposal that might have the power to capture the Naga imagination at the moment might take the Burmese government into confidence and bring the Nagas of Burma into the picture as well. This can be the first step towards a comprehensive dialogue that includes Nagas as well as the other stakeholders to consider an arrangement that crosses both transnational and inter-state borders which recognises Naga identity, alongside both the sovereignty of India and Burma and the territorially embodied identities of states like Manipur and Assam. Without such a significant shifting of gears, it is unlikely that the seven-year old Naga peace process can overcome the formidable obstacles it currently faces to end one of world's most protracted and tragic armed conflicts.

Excerpt

THE STATESMAN 12 FEB 2005

কেন্দ্রের গয়ংগচ্ছ মনোভাবে মুইভারা বিরক্ত

জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল • নয়াদিল্লি

৯ ফেব্রুয়ারি: এক মাসের উপর আইজাক-মুইভা আলোচনার জন্য ভারতে। আজও কোনও সমাধানসূত্রের ভিত্তিতে দু'পক্ষের আলোচনা এগোবে তা স্থির হল না। কেন্দ্রের এই মনোভাবে তাঁরা ক্ষুব্ধ। সম্প্রতি দিল্লিতে স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিলের সঙ্গে দেখা করে তাঁরা জানিয়েছেন কেন্দ্র আগে বলুক তাদের কী সূত্র রয়েছে। নাগা সমস্যা সমাধানে কী দিতে পারে তারা? পাটিল সূত্র দিতে পারেননি। আজ সন্ধ্যায় প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে ঘণ্টাখানেক কথা হয়েছে মুইভাদের। তবে তাঁদের মধ্যে কী কথা হয়েছে জানা যায়নি।

সমাধান-সূত্র নিয়ে সরকারের মতানৈক্য চরমে। মধ্যস্থতাকারী পদ্মনাভাইয়া মুইভাকে দ্রুত আশ্বাস দিতে আগ্রহী। অন্য দিকে নাগাল্যান্ডের রাজ্যপাল শ্যামল দত্ত শান্তি আলোচনাকে এগোতে উৎসাহী হলেও বেশি তাড়াহুড়োয় রাজি নন। তিনি দিল্লিতে পাঠানো রিপোর্টে নাগাল্যান্ডে এখনই উপক্রম এলাকা আইন, সশস্ত্র

আইন তুলে নেওয়ার পক্ষে মত দেননি। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয় সূত্রে খবর, রাজ্যপাল আইনশৃঙ্খলাকেও রক্ষা করতে চান। জাতীয় নিরাপত্তা উপদেষ্টা এম কে নারায়ণন নিজেও চটজলদি সমাধানে বিশ্বাসী নন। এ বার মুইভার ভারত সফরের আগে পদ্মনাভাইয়াকে মধ্যস্থতাকারীর পদ থেকেই সরিয়ে দিতে চেয়েছিলেন তিনি। কিন্তু মুইভা কেন্দ্রকে জানান তাঁরা পদ্মনাভাইয়া ছাড়া কারও সঙ্গে আলোচনায় রাজি নন।

ডিমাপুরে একটি জনসভায় অত্যন্ত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ তিনটি সিদ্ধান্ত মুইভারা সংগঠনের পক্ষ থেকে ঘোষণা করেন। এক, নাগা জাতের স্বাভাব্য অর্জন। দুই, মণিপুর, অরুণাচল ও অসমের নাগা অধ্যুষিতগুলি সুসংহত করা। তিন, কেন্দ্র ও নাগা দু'পক্ষকেই আলোচনায় আন্তরিক হতে হবে।

এই ঘোষণা সম্পর্কে পদ্মনাভাইয়া প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে বোঝান, নাগা সার্বভৌমত্বের দাবি থেকে মুইভারা সরে এলেন। অতএব, এ বার কিছু ছাড় দিতে হবে। কিন্তু নারায়ণন মনে করেন, নাগাদের স্বাভাব্য অর্জনের মধ্যেই

সার্বভৌমত্বের দাবি নিহিত তাই সৌজন্যমূলক কথোপকথনে জোর দেওয়া বুদ্ধিমানের কাজ। কেন্দ্র দীর্ঘসূত্রিতার জন্যই নতুন একটি গোষ্ঠীকে আলোচনার দায়িত্ব দিয়ে দেয়। এই গোষ্ঠীতে আছেন অক্ষর ফার্নান্ডেজ, পৃথীরাজ চহ্লাণ প্রমুখ।

মুইভা এই গোষ্ঠী গঠনে অখুশি। তাঁর অভিযোগ, অক্ষর ব্যস্ত ভোটে। অথচ তাঁরা দিল্লি বসে আছেন কেন্দ্রের বিচারের আশায়। এই গোষ্ঠীকে সক্রিয় করে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয় পদ্মনাভাইয়ার গুরুত্ব কমানোর চেষ্টা করছে এমন আশঙ্কাও রয়েছে।

মুইভা মণিপুর, অরুণাচল, অসম—এই তিন রাজ্যের নাগাদের সংহতির দাবি তোলায় রাজ্যগুলিতে পাল্টা প্রতিক্রিয়া তীব্র হয়েছে। পাটিল উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলে গিয়ে এই উত্তেজনাকে প্রশমিত করার চেষ্টা করেছেন। মুইভা থাকাকালীনই নাগাল্যান্ডে চারটি বড় নাশকতার ঘটনা ঘটিয়েছে তাঁর গোষ্ঠী। মুইভার আক্ষেপ, নিজেদের ক্যাডার বাহিনীকে সবসময় তাঁরা নিয়ন্ত্রণ করতে পারছেন না। আইজাক নিজে লিখিত বিবৃতি দিয়ে এই ধরনের ঘটনার জন্য

ক্ষমাও চেয়েছেন। খাপলাং ও অন্য মুইভা-বিরোধী গোষ্ঠীগুলিকে কেন্দ্র পাল্টা দিল্লি বলে মুইভা ক্ষুব্ধ ছিলেন। কেন্দ্র-মুইভা আলোচনা ব্যর্থ হলে খাপলাং গোষ্ঠী নাগা-আবেগকে মূলধন করে আরও আক্রমণাত্মক হয়ে উঠতে সচেষ্ট হবে। কেন্দ্রের এক পক্ষ মনে করে খাপলাংদের দিয়ে মুইভাকে চাপে রাখা অনৈতিক। অন্য পক্ষের মত, খাপলাংদেরও হাতে রেখে মুইভার সঙ্গে দরকষাকষি সোজা হবে।

মুইভা নাগাল্যান্ডে ঘোষণা করেছেন, দু'পক্ষই সামরিক সমাধানে আর যাবে না। নিষ্পত্তি শান্তির পথেই করতে হবে। মুইভার পক্ষে এখন এই বয়সে আর জঙ্গলে ফেরা সম্ভব নয়।

অন্য দিকে যিসিং-এর দার্জিলিং পার্বত্য পরিষদের মতো স্বায়ত্তশাসনের প্রস্তাব কেন্দ্র দিতে চাইলেও মুইভার পক্ষে সেটা মানা সম্ভব নয়। এই পরিস্থিতিতে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয় মনে করছে, কোনও হাতেগরম সমাধানসূত্র তাদের কাছে নেই। আপাতত কথাবার্তা চলুক।

তারপর দেখা যাক, কতটা জমি ছাড়তে মুইভা রাজি।

INSURGENCY PROBLEMS MAY FIND A SOLUTION Ulfa's formal offer for talks

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Feb. 9. — By responding to the PMO's call for talks formally for the first time, the Ulfa has raised hope that there may be a solution to the problem of insurgency in the state.

Ulfa chairman Mr Arabinda Rajkhowa has sent a formal letter to Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, through noted litterateur Dr Mamoni Raisom Goswami, expressing the outfit's willingness to enter into talks with the government to arrive at an "agreement with honour and dignity".

Dr Goswami has been trying to break the ice between the

Centre and the banned outfit for the last few months.

Spurred by the first-ever formal talks offer from the banned Ulfa to the Prime Minister, the All Assam Students Union (Aasu) today reiterated that both the security forces and the Ulfa should give up violence to pave the way for a solution to the insurgency problem through negotiation.

Aasu adviser Dr Samujjal Bhattacharyya called on the government to declare a unilateral ceasefire with the Ulfa.

"Neither the issues that are to be discussed nor the place where the negotiation will take place should become a hurdle for holding dialogue," another Aasu leader said.

When asked to comment on the Ulfa's long-standing demand for sovereignty, which is not recognised by the Government of India, he said the Centre should try to find out why Ulfa insists on this.

The Aasu also demanded that the Centre put in a concerted effort to find a solution to this problem as has with the NSCN-IM.

However, security forces here are sceptical about the Ulfa's formal proposal for talks. A source in the state police commented that given the policy adopted by the government vis-à-vis insurgents, talks with the Ulfa would become a reality only when the outfit gave up violence and dropped its demand for sovereignty.

THE STATESMAN

10 FEB 2005

Ulfa offers peace talks with PM

Guwahati
8 FEBRUARY

ULFA has sent Prime Minister Manmohan Singh a formal offer of peace talks aimed at ending more than 26 years of insurgency in the region, a rebel mediator said on Tuesday.

An emissary of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) late on Monday handed over the letter from the group's chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa to Assamese writer Indira Goswami, sought by the outfit to mediate for talks with New Delhi.

"I had received a sealed letter addressed to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh from the Ulfa chairman," Ms Goswami said in Assam's main city of Guwahati.

"The letter contains Ulfa's terms and conditions for talks

with New Delhi. The Ulfa wants the core issue of sovereignty or independence to be discussed in the talks." This is the first time the Ulfa, a rebel group fighting for an independent Assamese homeland since 1979, has made a formal offer of talks with New Delhi by sending a signed letter to the Prime Minister.

The Assamese author said the letter was in response to an offer by India's National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan last fortnight for holding talks with the Ulfa in a neutral country. Narayanan told me to get a formal letter from the Ulfa expressing their desire for talks with the government. I had conveyed the same to the Ulfa and this letter has come in now," said Ms Goswami, who teaches modern Indian languages at Delhi University. — IANS

The Economic Times

The Economic Times 09 FEB 2005

অবশেষে প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে চিঠি আলফা নেতার

৭/২/৫৫ রঞ্জন সেনগুপ্ত • গুয়াহাটি

৭ ফেব্রুয়ারি: অবশেষে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দফতরের শর্ত মেনে নিল আলফা। আলফা-চেয়ারম্যান অরবিন্দ রাজখোয়া চিঠি লিখেছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে। সেই চিঠি আপাতত লেখিকা ইন্দিরা গোস্বামী ওরফে মামণি রায়সমের হেফাজতে। আগামিকাল গুয়াহাটি থেকে দিল্লি ফিরছেন ইন্দিরাদেবী। রাজধানী পৌঁছে বুধবার তিনি জাতীয় নিরাপত্তা উপদেষ্টা এম কে নারায়ণনের হাতে প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে চিঠিটি তুলে দেবেন। ইন্দিরাদেবী আজ নিজেই এ খবর জানান।

মনমোহন সিংহকে লেখা আলফা-চেয়ারম্যানের চিঠিতে কী আছে, তা জানেন না লেখিকা। খামের মুখ 'সিল' করা চিঠির বিষয়বস্তু প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দফতরে পৌঁছানোর পরে তিনি জানতে পারবেন বলে ইন্দিরাদেবীর ধারণা। তবে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের সঙ্গে শান্তি আলোচনা শুরু করার শর্ত হিসাবে আলফা-চেয়ারম্যান যে তাঁদের মূল দাবি 'সার্বভৌমত্ব'-কে রাখার কথাই লিখেছেন, তা জানেন লেখিকা। তিনি খুশি, কারণ এই প্রথম সরকারকে কোনও চিঠি দিল আলফা।

শান্তি আলোচনার শর্ত হিসাবে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কাছে আলফার পক্ষে পরেশ বরুয়া, অথবা অরবিন্দ রাজখোয়াকে চিঠি লিখতে হবে বলে ইন্দিরাদেবীকে জানান নারায়ণন। তাঁর যুক্তি ছিল, আলফা লিখিত ভাবে তাদের দাবি না জানালে কী করে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের সঙ্গে আলোচনার জন্য প্রধানমন্ত্রী ওই জঙ্গি সংগঠনকে চিঠি দেবেন? নারায়ণন বলেন, প্রয়োজনে বিদেশের গিয়েও আলফার সঙ্গে কথা বলতে রাজি আছেন তাঁরা। এই শর্ত পরেশ বরুয়াকে জানিয়ে দেন ইন্দিরাদেবী। জঙ্গি নেতাকে তিনি এও বলেন, "এই সুযোগ হারানো ঠিক হবে না।" তারপরে প্রায় দু'সপ্তাহের মাথায় প্রধানমন্ত্রীর উদ্দেশ্যে চিঠি দিল আলফা। আজ ইন্দিরাদেবী বলেন, "আলফার এক দূত আমাকে চিঠিটা পৌঁছে দিয়েছে। এক পাতার চিঠিতে কী লেখা আছে, তা আমি জানি না। তবে আজ পরেশ বরুয়া ফোন করে আমাকে চিঠির বিষয়বস্তু কিছুটা জানিয়েছেন।" তাঁর কথা অনুযায়ী, "সংগঠনের মূল দাবিকে সামনে রেখে আলোচনা করতে রাজি আছে আলফা।"

ANADABAZAR PATTIKA

07 FEB 2005

New Delhi and the north-eastern states failed to take remedial action against migration that started during British rule resulting in insurgency, strife, discontent and deployment of security forces

EFFECTS OF MIGRATION

418 672
By JR MUKHERJEE

THE north-east has over 500 ethnic groups owing to frequent migrations and invasions, though all its neighbours played a major role in segregating these groups, concentrating the population in the main river valleys. The Siliguri corridor and the Brahmaputra valley became the core. Imposition of British rule, the philosophy of imperial capitalism, creation of infrastructure to export extracted raw material to Chittagong and Kolkata along with large-scale import of staff and labour, induction of Kukis to counter Nagas, settling of Nepalese in large numbers, encouraging Bangladeshi migration to till land, the policy of divide and rule, the creation of artificial state boundaries and creation of Inner Lines to segregate the hill tribes have all contributed to the situation that exists today.

Migration of population creating demographic changes is an issue of concern. While figures quoted by authorities are suspect, it is pertinent to note that in the 20th century under British rule, immigration and migration, particularly into Assam, North Bengal and Tripura, was probably to the extent of about 30 per cent of the population, of which about two-thirds was from East Bengal. Unfortunately, after Independence this trend was allowed to continue, with the majority of the migrants being from then East Pakistan. In 1971, again there was a major refugee exodus from East Pakistan, the majority of whom never returned owing to the situation which led to the Indo-Pak war.

Thereafter, consequent to major agitations, particularly in Assam, immigration was reduced but did not stop, primarily due to vote-bank politics. As people are now conscious of the demographic changes, illegal immigration has come down

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to a trickle. The effects of immigration are that Tripura which had a tribal majority in the early 20th century is now a tribal minority state with a consequent long-drawn insurgent movement. Sikkim now has a Nepalese majority. 30 per cent of Assam's population consists of Bangladeshi immigrants with another 8 to 10 per cent from Bengal, Bihar, UP and Rajasthan, giving birth to the Ulfa, Bodo Karbi and Dimasa insurgencies; Assam

ferent communications. Chittagong was no longer available. It became uneconomical to trade either with the rest of India or through Kolkata. Consequently both Kolkata's industry and Assam's fell into decay. Artificial boundaries created between India and Burma split the Naga, the Kuki-Chin-Mizo tribes and the Meiteis (Manipuris), pitted ethnic groups against each other and segregated the hill people from plainsmen, created the demands by Nagas,

The British had almost decided to give undivided Assam to East Pakistan till the Assamese agitated



now also has a minority Islamic fundamentalist movement, reduced per capita income and forest wealth.

In North Bengal it gave rise to the Naxalite, GNLF and Kamtapuri movements. In Meghalaya it gave birth to the Khasi movement and the anti-non-Khasi agitations. Other hill states adopted harsh anti-immigrant policies. While we may blame the British, the fact remains that the maximum number of immigrants came after Independence. Both Delhi and the States failed to take suitable remedial action giving rise to insurgency, strife, discontent, unnecessary deployment of security forces resulting in wasteful expenditure.

The partition disrupted trading patterns. East Pakistan being hostile, no routes were available except through the Siliguri corridor to the rest of India with extremely indif-

Mizos and Meiteis for uniting their homelands and sowed the seeds of ethnic sub-nationalism and strife.

The British had almost decided to give undivided Assam to East Pakistan till the Assamese agitated that their future lay with India — something that Assam and present-day Bangladesh have never forgotten. Politically aware hill tribes feared assimilation into either the Hindu or Muslim homeland and demanded freedom from the British. Independence with a weak and inexperienced leadership and administration, coupled with communal violence and a bad economic situation in the north-east after partition, contributed to a difficult situation. The British Forward Policy in trying to bring areas of Arunachal (NEFA) under direct control brought India into direct confrontation with the Chinese who also claimed these areas.

The socialist movements and their success in Russia and China drew dissenters from the north-east into their fold. Chinese irritation with India over border disputes automatically resulted in their giving whole-hearted support to such groups which included insurgents from Naga and Mizo Hills and Manipur.

The late fifties saw the start of Naga insurgency and commitment of security forces in the Naga Hills. The Meitei insurgency started almost the same time with the Lushai (Mizo) Hills insurgency a few years later. The insurgencies were sustained for long periods due to external support and power politics, popular support of the people, and the prevailing environment all over South-east Asia. It needs to be noted that Central and Northern Myanmar were in flames while Malaya, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos were starting to get communist-supported insurgencies.

India's quarrel with China leading to the Indo-China war of 1962, US support to the Tibetan insurgency reportedly from Indian soil, Western support to India against China only strengthened China's resolve to help the Indian insurgent groups. India's antagonism also gave Pakistan the resolve to support these groups through East Pakistan and to join hands with China. India's subsequent alliance with Russia, who had fallen out with China during the Cold War, brought the West clandestinely into the fray. There was thus no dearth of external and environmental support for the insurgencies. While after Mao's death, China has always claimed stoppage of this support, circumstances indicate that whenever we happen to have annoyed China, there has always been an upsurge of insurgency and whenever we have pleased them, insurgency is on a low key.

In the next part I will cover Assam and subsequently the other states.

TOO LITTLE BY HALF

Reformed rebels deserve better

THE recent surrender of another 57 Ulfa and National Liberation Front of Boroland cadres before GOC, 4 Corps, Lieutenant-General AS Jamwal is welcome, but curiously periodical trickles of this nature seem not to have made much of an impact on the overall law and order situation nor on the contingency of the two outfits, as evident from their unchecked murderous forays and subversive activities. So much so that former Assam chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta avoided being seen at a surrender ceremony organised by the Army — he was averse to being seen to be on the wrong side of the Ulfa hardcore — and discouraged such piecemeal surrenders, insisting on their coming forward for negotiations, though he never encouraged anything of this nature during his term.

According to official sources, more than 7,000 militants have surrendered since the 1998 announcement of the rehabilitation scheme. Former rebels are given vocational training of their choice with a monthly stipend of Rs 2,000 per month and are left to fend for themselves when they complete the course. Those found eligible have been provided jobs in the Army and the security forces and have secured a future. But many — most of them overaged — must manage as best they can. In their defence, though, the government is morally obliged to oversee their proper rehabilitation for having wooed them to surrender in the first place. It should seriously consider some commendable suggestions by private organisations for the creation of seed money and the formation of cooperatives to help these reformed militants with a modest beginning. More especially since more and more of them are said to be looking for opportunities to walk away from a rigorous jungle life because they are disillusioned by their leaders' ostentatious lifestyles in foreign countries and the broken dreams of "Swadhin Asom".

Naga talks begin on tentative note

By Mahendra Ved/TNN

New Delhi: Despite the bonhomie expressed by government as well as separatist Naga leaders who met here on Thursday, there was something tentative about the beginning of substantive talks, the first in over three decades.

For one, Issac Chishi Swu, who heads the NSCN (Issac-Muivah) along with T Muivah, kept away from the venue, although he was in town. Neither side provided an explanation for his absence. Independent sources said Muivah calls the shots and too much need not be read into Issac's absence.

It is, however, entirely possible that Issac will come for the substantive round. Also, Muivah's statement distributed after the talks, dated Wednesday clarified that "the level of talks will continue, as before, at the Prime Minister's level."

This reiteration meant that the ministers would discuss all outstanding issues, beginning with the less contentious ones and further decisions would need to involve the PM. The first round got off positively after the government assured the Naga leaders that their demand for 'Naga integration'



A file picture of home minister Shivraj Patil with NSCN leaders I C Swu (right) and T Muivah

was very much on the agenda. The Naga delegation was reassured that some media reports quoting home minister Shivraj Patil had misrepresented the government's stand on the issue.

However, what the Nagas call integration, is a contentious demand that requires re-drawing boundaries of the states adjoining Nagaland where the Naga populace has lived for long. Earlier efforts by the NDA government did not take off even though the Northeastern states were assured that their areas would not be touched. Interestingly, maintaining sanctity of the present

boundaries has been reiterated in the UPA's common minimum programme.

Muivah told reporters that he was aware of the government's problem. But added that the Nagas were not subject to the Indian system. The boundaries were drawn by the British and subsequent governments had continued with them. The Nagas had had no say. In any case, "We are on our own land and are not seeking territories from the Ahoms, Manipuris or Arunachalis", he said.

Despite these thoughts expressed after the first round, Muivah told reporters that the two sides had a better understanding and progress had been made. He also praised the Naga leaders for being realistic.

The ministerial team that will hold substantive talks for the next two days comprising of Oscar Fernandes, Prithviraj Chavan and S. Reghupathy were also present. So were Union home secretary Dharendra Singh and K. Padmanabhaiah, the government's pointsperson on the Naga issue. Fernandes who is expected to lead the government side at the talks that would be held here, termed the first round as excellent.

Smoking the peace pipe

THE official talks between the National Socialist Council of Nagalim and the Government of India began on Thursday and are to continue over a few days in New Delhi at the home ministry. The discussions apparently are scheduled to proceed, despite reports of major gaps between the two negotiating positions.

But that is as is to be – the political coalition which makes up the current GOI has a manifesto on which it won a democratic mandate from the people of the country and in which it has expressed its commitment to the political integrity of the north-eastern states. The states involved – Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh – as has been observed from the political statements of their leaders and even civil society groups, such as student organisations, have opposed the extension of Naga lands.

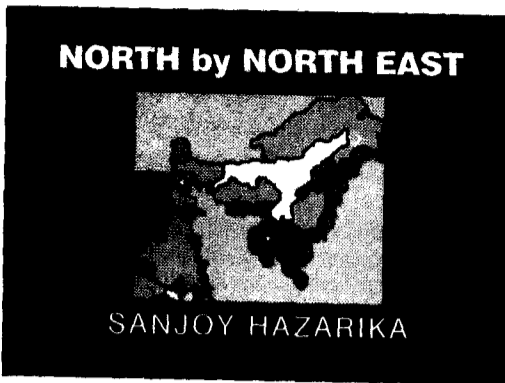
The NSCN, without talking about sovereignty, is asserting the traditional Naga position on integration of Naga-inhabited lands, which are now, according to them, dispersed over four states: Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. This is the point that Th Muivah, the general secretary of the NSCN, makes at the talks, that the Nagas are not demanding any other group's land but their own.

This is going to be a tough and lengthy process because the talks have only begun – the last such dialogue took place in the 1960s with the undivided Naga movement whose representatives (Isak Chisi Swu, chairman of the NSCN, was a member of the group at the time) held talks with then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. That delegation was put up at Hyderabad House, where visiting foreign repeat foreign delegations are normally accommodated.

But both sides, Muivah and home minister Shivraj Patil, remarked at the outset that the issues were difficult, particularly that of land. As he has stated often before, Muivah said that while he understood the difficulties of the GOI, the latter should also understand the difficulties of the Naga side. There is a need for hard realism on both sides, not rhetoric, as well as an open mind – difficult partners these! What is interesting is that Swu was not present on the first day and came for lunch on the second but not for the formal talks.

This is the time for the other concerned groups in the North-east to meet with the Naga leadership, whether in Delhi or when they return to Nagaland – if they plan to do so after the talks. A neutral venue such as Delhi could be the right place for meetings between stakeholders such as the chief ministers of the states concerned and the I-M leadership. The home ministry or the Group of Ministers can be the facilitator for these discussions, which should be held in a calm atmosphere.

Given the dynamics of Manipur, it may be advisable to postpone such a meeting with the Manipur chief minister till later. Yet, that has to happen at some point – you cannot postpone the day of reckoning and have, for lack of a better



more relevant to the North-east.

Moirang INA Memorial

A LETTER to *The Statesman* this week, responding to an earlier column about the Commonwealth cemetery at Manipur's capital of Imphal, asked about whether there were any memorials for the soldiers of the Indian National Army who had laid down their lives in their brave but ill-fated effort to regain the country, a story that is wonderfully told in Amitabh Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*.

Indeed there is one, at Moirang, about 50 km from Imphal, where the Indian Tricolour was first hoisted on Indian soil. I went there about four years ago and was deeply moved by the museum which houses photographs, speeches, writings and other mementos of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and his followers. But even at that time, the place was not well maintained because of lack of funds.

About two months ago, two friends went from Imphal to Moirang to visit the site and came back distressed at the condition of the memorial: they found it closed, decrepit and without electricity.

Is this the way we honour one of our greatest national heroes? If Kangla Fort can be handed over to the state government, why can't the place where the *tiranga* was first flown in India be a national monument and be maintained by the Centre? That surely is the least we can do, in addition to getting the place cleaned up, have the memorial properly restored and provided adequate security.



Th Muivah (right) addresses the "4th Naga People's Consultative Meeting To Strengthen Indo-Naga Peace Talks" at Hebron, near Dimapur, while Isak Swu listens.

expression, got to bite the bullet. For however much Delhi and the Naga delegation will agree, they have to sell it to their other stakeholders – and there are many, including the two other Naga political groups which are not in the talks.

But Assam's Tarun Gogoi and Arunachal's Gegong Apang should be brought in – they can welcome our Naga friends with *gamosas* and shawls and, over a cup of tea (or many cups of tea), chat with them over the need for good relations and their difficulties over land issues. Perhaps all sides, in association with the GOI, can appoint a committee or a Group of Eminent Persons (from all states involved, headed by a person of legal eminence) or give it to a fresh State Reorganisation Committee. The latter is being talked about as a possibility but do not discount the first two, which may be

Finer's move

SUBHASH AGARWALA, the outspoken head of the Federation of Industries and Commerce of the North Eastern Region (Finer), has blasted efforts by the Centre to extend the benefits applicable to the region to North Bengal. The extension of the

North East Industrial Policy to North Bengal could result in industrial units shifting from Assam and Meghalaya to West Bengal. This is clearly unacceptable to both business and industry in the region although the state governments are silent if not somnambulant. Is this another effort by Bengal trying to dominate and exploit the North-east as it has done in the past?

Kolkata's comrades (and industrialists), perhaps the most formidable lobby in Delhi, should understand this isn't appreciated and will be opposed strongly by other sections of society, not just business in the North-east. The region is poor enough – it's down at the bottom of the Indian heap; why try to impoverish it further and take away those little initiatives that would generate local employment and entrepreneurship?

Arunachal's Chakma refugees

By M Amarjeet Singh

FOR decades, the people of Arunachal Pradesh, among the most ethnically complex regions of the country, have been concerned about their future. Some blame the presence of the Chakma and Hajong refugees whose deportation they have been demanding and who they claim were "dumped" by the Government of India. Virtually all political parties in the state have made promises to resolve the four-decade old crisis but the matter still remains untouched.

In the 1960s, following the construction of Kaptai hydroelectric dam in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of the then East Pakistan, over 45,000 Chakmas were displaced with many seeking refuge in India. In 1964, the GOI settled about 35,000 of them in the then North Eastern Frontier Agency, in the area that comprises present-day Lohit, Changlang and Papumpare districts of Arunachal.

With the erstwhile NEFA being upgraded into the full-fledged state of Arunachal Pradesh in 1987, the issue gathered momentum. Since then, cutting across party lines, successive state governments have been pressing for the Chakmas' deportation from the state. For instance, in 1992, the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly passed a resolution to deport them from the state. Also, the influential student body, All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union, issued "Quit Arunachal Pradesh" notices on the Chakmas and Hajongs, urging them to leave the state by September 1994. This provoked outrage among human rights groups across the country and was challenged legally.

But despite the growing resentment, fuelled by political parties, the settlers were also issued migration certificates in the 1960s, thus signifying their legal

entry into the country.

The granting of the migration certificates, in a way, made clear New Delhi's intent of making them future citizens. As a result, from the early 1990s, the Chakma-Hajongs heightened their demand for citizenship rights. The Supreme Court also ruled in their favour but the local government refused to budge. Finally, despite resistance, a total of 1,497 Chakmas and Hajongs were enrolled in the state's voter list on January 2004, thanks to the Central Election Commission.

To the host communities, the presence of the Chakmas and Hajongs appears a potential threat to their indigenous culture and traditions. The apprehension is that the 65,000-strong Chakma/Hajong community, repre-



A Chakma woman in Arunachal.

senting a political force, although dormant now, has every potential of emerging as a major threat to the political equations in the state. Also, the hosts are increasingly getting worried about the gradual transfer of land from their hands to the refugees. According to the state government (White Paper on Chakma and Hajong Refugee Issue, 1996), way back in 1969, Chakmas and Hajongs in Changlang district alone numbered around 12,563 in 2,296 hamlets. A decade later, they numbered 17,994 in 3,310 hamlets. In addition, there are allegations of encroachment on reserved forestland.

The Arunachalese say they have no objection if the refugees are settled outside the state. The issue is complex and has to be tackled taking into account local interests as well as those of the migrants. Ignoring local sentiments will have an adverse impact on the state's security, which is already buffeted by the presence of small rebel groups as well as the intrusion of the two factions of National Socialist Council of Nagalim in eastern Arunachal. It is worth noting that one militant faction, the National Liberation Front of Arunachal, has also protested the enrollment of Chakmas and Hajong on state electoral rolls.

There is also concern in the state about another extremely explosive issue, again related to identity and land – the demand of the NSCN for integration of the districts of Changlang and Tirap, where Naga tribes live, into the scheme of a Naga homeland – and this has provoked parties across the board in the state to declare that it will not give "an inch" of territory to the Naga dream.

(The author is a Research Associate at Institute for Conflict Management, Guwahati.)

শান্তি-বৈঠকে রাজি মণিপুরী জঙ্গিরা

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, গুয়াহাটি, ৩
ফেব্রুয়ারি: মণিপুরের নিষিদ্ধ জঙ্গি
সংগঠন ইউনাইটেড ন্যাশনাল
লিবারেশন ফ্রন্ট (ইউএনএলএফ)
চারদফা শর্তে সরকারের সঙ্গে শান্তি
আলোচনায় বসতে রাজি হয়েছে।

জঙ্গি সংগঠনের পেশ করা চারদফা
শর্ত হল: ● রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের তত্ত্বাবধানে
তাদের মূল দাবি সার্বভৌমত্বের উপর
গণভোট নিতে হবে। ● রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের
শান্তি বাহিনীকে মণিপুরে নিয়োগ
করতে হবে। ● গণভোটে রায় তাদের
পক্ষে গেলে মণিপুরের রাজনৈতিক
ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তর করতে হবে। ● ওই
তিন শর্ত মানলে শান্তি বাহিনীর কাছে
তারা সমস্ত অস্ত্র সংবরণ করবে।

জঙ্গি সংগঠনের চেয়ারম্যান সানা
ওয়াইমা বলেছেন, “ভারত-মণিপুর
বিরোধ গণতান্ত্রিক পথে মেটাতে
আলোচনার যে প্রস্তাব দিয়েছেন
রাজ্যপাল এস এস সিধু, আমরা তার
সঙ্গে সহমত পোষণ করছি।” তিনি
বলেন, “মণিপুরের মানুষ স্বাধীনতা ও
সার্বভৌমত্বের মতো গণতান্ত্রিক

অধিকার পেতে চায়। গণভোটের
মাধ্যমে তাঁদের মত অবাধ ও সুষ্ঠুভাবে
জানানোর বিষয়টি নিশ্চিত করতেই
রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের শান্তিবাহিনীর উপস্থিতির
কথা বলা হয়েছে।” এই চারদফা দাবি
যে কোনওভাবেই মানা সম্ভব নয়, তা
জানিয়ে সরকারি মুখপাত্র বলেন, সেই
দিক থেকে বিচার করলে
ইউএনএলএফ-এর শর্ত দিয়ে বৈঠকে
বসার ইচ্ছা প্রকাশের মধ্যে নতুনত্ব
নেই। কিন্তু ওই জঙ্গি সংগঠন এই প্রথম
প্রকাশ্যে এমন ইচ্ছা প্রকাশ করায়
বিষয়টি একটা অন্য মাত্রা পেয়েছে।

নিজেদের ‘স্বাধীনতা ও
সার্বভৌমত্বের’ দাবি পূরণের জন্য
‘গণভোট’ চাওয়া উত্তর-পূর্বের
রাজ্যগুলিতে কেনও নতুন ঘটনা নয়।
ভারত স্বাধীন হওয়ার পরে নাগাল্যান্ডে
ওই একই বিষয়ের উপর গণভোট
নেওয়া হলে দেখা যায়, রাজ্যের
শতকরা নব্বই ভাগেরও বেশি মানুষ
‘সার্বভৌম নাগাল্যান্ড’ রাষ্ট্র গঠনের
পক্ষে রায় দেন। তারপর ৫০ বছর
কেটে গিয়েছে। একই দাবিতে রাজ্যের

সর্ববৃহৎ জঙ্গি সংগঠন এনএসসিএন
(আইএম)-এর সঙ্গে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের
গত সাত বছর ধরে আলোচনা চলছে।

অসমের ক্ষেত্রেও ওই দাবি
উঠেছে। তবে আলফার গণভোটের
দাবি প্রত্যাখ্যান করেছে কেন্দ্র ও রাজ্য
সরকার। কিন্তু সরকারি মুখপাত্রের
কথায়, ইউএনএলএফ-এর বিবৃতির পর
এ বার দু’পক্ষের মধ্যে দর কষাকষির
রাস্তা খুলে যেতে পারে।

প্রজাতন্ত্র দিবসের দিন রাজ্যপাল
এস এস সিধু সরকারি অনুষ্ঠানে তাঁর
বক্তৃতায় রাজ্যের সব জঙ্গি সংগঠনের
কাছে আবেদন জানিয়ে বলেন, হিংসা
ছেড়ে গণতান্ত্রিক পদ্ধতিতে জঙ্গিরা
তাদের দাবি নিয়ে আলোচনা করতে
পারে। জঙ্গি-প্রধানের প্রস্তাব, শর্ত
মেনে তারা অস্ত্র সংবরণ করলে
গণভোট শুরুর আগে মণিপুর থেকে
সেনা ও আধা সামরিক বাহিনী
প্রত্যাহার করতে পারে দিল্লি। সে
ক্ষেত্রে মণিপুরের অন্যান্য জঙ্গি
সংগঠনগুলিকেও অস্ত্র সংবরণ করার
জন্য তিনি আবেদন জানাতে পারেন।

I of NSCN absent, M picks up integration poser again

96-3
1/2
9-NB or
EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 3

TALKS between Naga leaders and the Centre began on Thursday with the former seeking a clarification from Home Minister Shivraj Patil on his statement rejecting integration of Naga inhabited areas.

Emerging from the hour-long meeting, NSCN (IM) general secretary Th. Muivah said, "We are demanding the land which belongs to us Nagas. We want to live in the territory that belongs to us. The Naga people have been living separately and we want to live together." He also claimed no solution would be possible without integration of Naga-inhabited areas.

Patil, during his three-day visit to the North-East, had said that integration of Naga inhabited areas was not possible since "territorial integrity of states" figures in the CMP. "If anything has to be done, it will be done with the concurrence and consent of all people concerned."

It is understood that the Naga delegation has been assured that the demand for integration will be considered, but redrawing of boundaries will also have to be acceptable to all the states concerned.

The Government side was led by Patil and comprised Oscar Fernandes, S. Regupati and Privithiraj Chauhan. National Security Advi-



Patil offering a seat to Muivah at the meeting. Ravi Batra

sor M.K. Narayanan, Director, IB. ESCL Narasimhan and the Centre's interlocutor K. Padmanabiah were also present during the talks.

The Naga delegation was led by Th. Muivah, while Issac Chisi Swu was not present at the meeting. Naga sources, however, did not attach much significance to Swu's absence, adding that Swu is unlikely to be present for discussions on Friday as well. It is understood that talks will start from 11 am on Friday.

Earlier, Muivah said that in 1964, the people of Nagaland considered India their enemy. But "we no longer think similarly", he said, adding that it is "essential for Nagas to understand the difficulties of the

Government of India and at the same time, the Government should understand our difficulties".

Muivah said the Naga leadership was doing its best to build an atmosphere that encouraged understanding. Replying to Muivah's opening remarks, Patil told the 11-member delegation that the Centre "would continue to talk to them in the same spirit" and that the Government wanted the "atmosphere of understanding to continue".

This is the second time that Muivah and Swu are in India for talks with the Centre. After three decades in exile, they held parleys with the Vajpayee government two years back.

Naga talks resume

9/16/05
By Vinay Kumar 10-1

NEW DELHI, FEB. 3. Talks between the Centre and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) leadership resumed today with both sides asserting the willingness to work for a mutually acceptable and honourable solution to the five-decade-old Naga problem.

Emerging from an hour-long meeting with the Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, and top

9/2
Government officials, the NSCN (I-M) general secretary, Thuingaleng Muivah, said that he looked forward to "an intensification of the negotiations in coming weeks and months."

During the meeting, he reiterated the organisation's demand for the unification of all Naga-dominated areas in the North-East— a touchy and controversial issue that triggered violent agitations in Manipur two years ago.

Boundaries of N-E states will remain intact

Times News Network

Guwahati: In a clear message to the NSCN (I-M) leadership, which is in Delhi to hold the next rounds of talks with UPA leaders, Union home minister Shivraj Patil said the Centre cannot think of altering inter-state boundaries—a must if the idea of a Greater Naglim professed by Isak Swu and T Muivah is to fructify.

The two leaders after marathon discussions at Camp Hebron in

Dimapur had armed themselves with a “consensus” on Naga integration that called for a unification of “all Naga people and their lands”. There is a substantial population of Nagas in Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. The Naga talks with the UPA government are slated to begin on Thursday.



Shivraj Patil

Maintaining that the government's common programme promises to keep inter-state boundaries in the N-E as it is, the Union minister said, “We are a responsible ally and we will like our common programme to be understood in clear terms.”

He, however, said in the same breath that he is “positive” about an early solution of the Naga problem. The NDA government, during whose time the NSCN (I-M) talks received a central push, had also toed the same line and said it was imperative to arrive at a consensus and take all the states concerned into confidence before the NSCN (I-M) demand was given a serious thought.

Patil said militancy in the region had come down by 20 to 25 per cent “as in Jammu and Kashmir”.

Patil reviews Assam Accord

By Sushanta Talukdar

GUWAHATI, FEB. 1. The Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, today called for the strengthening of anti-infiltration measures along the India-Bangladesh border. He suggested the erection of high-quality barbed wire fences and strong vigil along the riverine areas, even as the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) stayed away from the scheduled tripartite meeting convened by the Ministry of Home Affairs to review the implementation of the Assam Accord.

The AASU had intimated, in writing, its decision to reject the invitation to attend the tripartite meeting. They demanded that the review meeting be chaired by the Prime Minister.

Standing firm

The newly-elected AASU president, Shankar Prasad Rai, told *The Hindu* over phone from Moran in Dibrugarh district that the student body was firm in its decision as the both the State and Central Governments had gone back on their assurance of holding a review meeting presided over by the Prime Minister. A new 52-member AASU central executive body was elected at a conference, which concluded at Moran today.

The Centre and the State Government decided to go ahead with the review meeting as scheduled with the Assam Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, briefing Mr. Patil on the status of the implementation of various clauses of the accord.

The meeting was also attended by the Union Minister for Development of the North-Eastern Region (DONER), P.R. Kyndiah, the Assam Governor, Lt. Gen.



The Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, shakes hands with the Sikkim Chief Minister, Pawan Kumar Chamling, at a meeting of the North-East Chief Ministers in Guwahati on Tuesday. Also seen (from left) are the Chief Ministers, Ibobi Singh (Manipur), D.D. Lapang (Meghalaya) and Zoram Thanga (Mizoram). — Photo: Ritu Raj Konwar

(retd.) Ajai Singh, besides high officials of both the Central and State Governments.

Mr. Patil asked the State Government to submit a detailed proposal for the procurement of motorboats for round-the-clock vigil of the riverine areas of the India-Bangladesh border.

He said the Centre would provide the required funds.

The assurance to hold a review of the accord at the

Prime Minister-level was given to the student body on the eve of the India-Asean car rally held last year, in lieu of the AASU withdrawing its call to boycott the rally, which was flagged off by the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh.

However, the Ministry of Home Affairs is the nodal ministry for implementation of the accord.

Signed by the AAASU, Centre and the State

Government, the accord led to the end of a six-year anti-foreigner movement spearheaded by the student body from 1979 to 1985.

The AASU alleged that even 20 years after the accord, most of the clauses have not been implemented while infiltration continues through the porous border.

Mr. Patil stressed the need to expedite the implementation of all the clauses of the accord.

Patil's N-E trip 'more than coincidental'

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 1. — Was the timing of Mr Shivraj Patil's trip to the North-east so calculated as to shy away from receiving, and subsequently making public, the Nanavati Commission report on the 1984 anti-Sikh riots till at least the first phase of the Assembly elections are over? Though officials denied this, speculation is doing the rounds that the timing of the home minister's visit to that region is "more than coincidental."

Consequent to the expiry of the Nanavati Commission's term on 31 January, a report was slated to be submitted to the minister.

However, as the latter is scheduled to return to the Capital only by tomorrow evening, the commission will have to wait for now. Those airing such speculation argue that Mr Patil could have very well planned his visit in such a way that it did not delay submission of the commission's report.

"Considering the sensitivity of the matter, the



Mr Shivraj Patil tries his hand on an LMG in Kaisalam in Mizoram on Tuesday. — PTI

home minister could have stayed put in Delhi on 31 January. More so since he wasn't going there in the wake of any eventuality there... Unlike Manipur where he did not go till two months even when there was a major public unrest," said one of them.

Official sources, however, rubbished such claims. "The trip was planned

long ago. There is no truth in such theories being floated by certain quarters," an official said.

And with regard to granting another extension to the commission, official sources say it had been made very clear when the last extension was granted to the commission that it was the final one.

Nanavati report

Mr Justice G Nanavati, who probed the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, will submit his report to Mr Patil on 3 February, official sources said tonight. Though the term of the commission ended on 31 January, Mr Justice Nanavati had said he would submit his report to Mr Patil after he returned from his visit to the North-east.

THE STATESMAN

02 FEB 2005

Honourable solution to Naga problem: Muivah

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, Feb. 1. — Ahead of a fresh round of talks with the Centre, NSCN (I-M) today said both sides could come closer and “an honourable solution” could be found to the Naga problem if the government moved forward, beyond recognising the uniqueness of their history.

For the first time in over 50 years the previous Vajpayee government had recognised the “uniqueness” of Naga history. “This is a step forward... When the actual ground conditions are recognised, both parties can come closer. That is the only way we can move towards a solution,” NSCN(I-M) general secretary Mr Thuingaleng Muivah said.

Mr Muivah, who will hold talks with the government along with NSCN (I-

M) chairman Mr Issac Swu from Thursday, said “the Nagas must appreciate the difficulties of the government. Likewise the government should also understand and appreciate the rights of the Nagas.”

“We are not demanding anything from you (government). We will respect India so long as the Nagas are respected,” he said. Observing that the British had divided the Naga people and the subsequent governments had continued with the same approach, Mr Muivah said “It has hurt their sentiments beyond words. The wound is still there... Nagas have for time immemorial lived in their own territory, not in the land of Meiteis or the Ahoms. We don’t claim an inch of the land of the Meiteis or the Assamese or the Arunachalese.”

Chamling to meet Patil, discuss security issues

Amalendu Kundu
GANGTOK 29 JANUARY

SIKKIM chief minister Pawan Chamling will be leaving for Guwahati on Sunday to attend the northeastern chief ministers' meet, to be held on February 1. The meeting has been called by Union home minister Shivraj Patil to discuss the internal security issues of the North East.

When he had last met the home minister in early January, Mr Chamling had discussed the law and order situation of state.

He had informed Mr Patil that Sikkim is still the most peaceful state in the North East. Despite sharing borders with countries like Nepal and Bhutan, Sikkim has managed to remain peaceful for the 30 years, he had pointed out.

The home minister had responded positively to protecting the borders. He had assured of all assistance to check Maoist activities on the Nepal-Sikkim border. He also assured that increased numbers of the Indian Reserve Battalion (IRB) would be deployed and more Sikkimese boys would be recruited.

In that meeting Mr Chamling had requested that

more border roads be built. He had asked for proper vigilance in the sensitive areas. The Sikkim chief minister had sought 10-13 seater helicopters to run the regular service from Gangtok to Bagdogra, the only air link to Sikkim. The construction of an airport at Pakyong was also high on Mr Chamling's agenda. The Guwahati conclave is important for Sikkim, considering that reports of ISI has its hawk eye on Sikkim.

Last year, the central intelligence wing had spotted a Karachi-trained man, who was caught collecting military information. He was finally arrested in Delhi. Earlier in 2003, another ex-army man of Bangladesh was arrested. He had successfully planted a link man in the deputy GOC's residence.

These incidents only go further to underline the strategic importance of Sikkim, especially after China's virtual recognition of Sikkim as a part of India. Intelligence reports have also highlighted the possibility of Maoist infiltration and the potential of the state as a temporary shelter or a transit point.

An NDFB militant was also nabbed by Sikkim Police & Central Agency two years ago. Mr Chamling will be visiting Kolkata for two days from February 2.

30 JAN 2005

The Economic Times

9-11-05
51-9

Stalemate continues

By Bibhu Prasad Routray

ONE is not too sure what to make out of the NSCN (I-M)'s leadership's two-month stay in Nagaland. Anyway, this visit could have used by the outfit for two purposes, either to engage in a policy shift or to reinforce previously held ideas. Now it appears that despite the intervening period between the arrival of the Naga leaders in New Delhi on their second official visit and the beginning of fresh dialogue with the government in the first week of February, little has really changed in their attitudes although their stay has been interspersed with demonstrations of unheard of public protests as well as the more predictable support.

The I-M leadership wants to make the world feel that it now has the Naga people's mandate behind their claim for the integration of Naga-inhabited areas. It could only be a stop-gap arrangement before the larger goal of sovereignty. The four point resolution was passed at the end of the two-day consultative meet at what they call Hebron, a designated camp controlled by its armed cadres near the commercial town of Dimapur, on 20-21 January, and which included civil society groups, members of the NSCN and elements in other organisations which are supporters of its hard line. The gathering endorsed its primary demand i.e. "unification of the Naga areas is legitimate and therefore non-negotiable".

New Delhi, visibly, now tries to project a much more benign approach towards the conflict and the decision to allow the Naga leaders to visit Dimapur and hold consultation with a wide range of population is an example of this. There seems to be a realisation that New Delhi's policy towards Nagaland, since the country's independence has not been correct and a reversal in the same is urgently called for.

However, after the NSCN (I-M) leaders return to New Delhi to begin consultations, it will be amply clear that the situation has not changed. In fact, it is possible that New Delhi will face a more determined Isak Swu and Th. Muivah, the organisation's chairman and general secretary respectively.

On the surface, it would appear that the consultations that the I-M duo held in Di-



Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil holds a traditional spear and wears a Naga shawl presented to him by Isak Swu (right) and Th. Muivah (left), the chairman and general secretary respectively, of the NSCN (I-M) in New Delhi recently —PTI

mapur have not changed anything in the state and beyond, as far as finding a breakthrough is concerned. Even though deliberations were held with a wide range of people and organisations, the I-M leadership could not (perhaps did not) mend fences with their traditional rivals. In the end, any reconciliation with groups like the NSCN-K and the NNC were ruled out in tough language.

Given the fact that both the Khaplang faction and the NNC continue to retain some support in the state, it remains to be seen whether New Delhi would finally chose to sideline these two outfits completely and recognise the I-M faction as the "be all and end all".

There is little doubt where the state government of Nagaland stands on the issue of the integration of the Naga areas. On several occasions, Chief Minister Nephui Rio has been on record supporting such a cause. However, his counterparts in the affected states do not share any of his ideas. Thus,

recently the state governments of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh vowed not to part with even an inch of their territory for the so-called Nagalim or Naga homeland as the NSCN prefers to call it. The most interesting and categorical denial came from the government of Arunachal Pradesh, whose relations with the group have been a matter of debate in the past. In

fact, this time around, the state government has distanced itself from the visit of a group of MLAs from the Tirap and Changlang districts to Camp Hebron. Ibobi Singh, Chief Minister of Manipur, even went to the extent of asking Nagas who wanted to be a part of the Nagalim to leave the state, so virulent has been the opposition to the NSCN's grand scheme.

Even though the Nagalim has been projected as the dream homeland for the Nagas, such a project does overlook the fundamental differences between the Naga tribes. It is difficult to judge the enthusiasm for a 'lim' for the Nagas not only among the

tribes who are opposed to the NSCN-IM because their support to the NSCN-K and the NNC, but also the Naga tribes who live in other States. In fact, before the NSCN-IM duo arrived in Dimapur, statements were issued by the Ao Senden and the Sumi Hoho, asking their constituents to boycott the reception. The Konyak Hoho, representing the largest Naga tribe, has declared among the Nagas that reconciliation and unity must precede any agreement. This tribe dominates the NSCN (K).

Similarly, in Manipur, apart from the district of Ukhrul, where Muivah belongs, irrespective of the faction's claims, it is highly probable that Nagas would be less receptive to the idea of a Naga homeland. Thus, pro-Nagalim statements in Manipur mostly emerge from organisations like the United Naga Council (UNC) and the Naga Students' Federation (NSF), and not by any Naga tribal association.

The NSCN's problem grows even bigger while dealing with the other tribal population who presently inhabit the areas proposed for the Nagalim. It is difficult to understand how the I-M leaders and also government of India will address the concerns of tribes like the Dimasas, Karbis and Kukis in the highly unlikely event of integration. The fact that such tribal populations have their own homeland dreams and also their own militants complicates the situation. In these circumstances, Muivah's call to such tribal bodies to shed apprehension about Nagalim holds out little. His pledge that such tribes could lead a fearless life in Nagalim and they would not be forced to convert and become Nagas has allayed few concerns.

Quite predictably, the Karbi Students' Association (KSA), the pro-talks faction of the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) and the Dima Halim Daoga (DHD) have rejected the Naga invitation.

In this background, the Naga imbroglio, even after the NSCN leadership's visit to Nagaland, can be viewed as the continuation of a stalemate. Even for hardcore optimists, there is little light of hope of an early breakthrough to the problem.

(The author is Director, Institute for Conflict Management, Guwahati)

Open forum

29 JAN 2005

THE STATESMAN

Logic at large

SF-8 28/11 Ulfa is bankrupt of ideas NE SF-7

Ulfa is active again after a lull of nearly a month, on which score there are two versions. On 17 December, Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa, e-mailed the media saying that commander-in-chief, Paresh Barua has undergone an operation in "a place where advanced medical treatment was available" and he was out of action. Two days later he was said to be recuperating. The other was that Bangladesh "agents" had forced Barua to "disappear" before and during the Saarc meeting at Dhaka this month (since postponed) following Delhi's threat not to participate. That the Ulfa started its subversive activities about the time the Saarc meeting was to have ended, lends support to the second theory. Clearly Barua's "illness" was a cover for a Bangladesh diktat. There is little doubt about Ulfa being tutored by "foreign" benefactors without whose support it is a spent force. An earlier attempt by litterateur Mamoni Goswami to bring Delhi and Ulfa to the negotiating table failed after the Centre rightly rejected the demand that sovereignty be discussed. Renewed contact with Mrs Goswami, suggests Barua is keen on a ceasefire, which is all old hat anyway. After all, Ulfa leaders brought their December 1991 "unilateral indefinite ceasefire" into ridicule by reneging on their word. If "indefinite" justifies the logical conclusion, the truce is on.

There is no evidence of Ulfa giving up violence. Its call for a boycott of Republic Day celebrations is routine. Even if it kills innocent children as it did last Independence Day at Dhemaji, the rhino-skinned Ulfa leadership has no qualms of conscience. But what was most unexpected was the regional Asom Gana Parishad's decision to stay away from official functions, citing government's failure to provide protection to the people. Could the AGP be providing an "intellectual" scaffolding to the Ulfa cause?

28 JAN 2005

THE STATESMAN

Kangla: Centre appointee clueless, govt forms team

SUDHI RANJAN SEN
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 24

THREE months after the symbolic Kangla Fort in Imphal was handed over to the Manipur government by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and over Rs 100 crore earmarked to turn it into India's first integrated archaeological park, the main person entrusted with its conservation is yet to hear from the authorities.

The Fort was the focus of the agitation that rocked the state following the alleged rape of Manorama Devi by officials of the Assam Rifles last year.

"Since the Fort was handed over to the state government, no one has contacted me," said Professor Nalini Thakur of the School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), who authored a comprehensive study on how to preserve and turn the Fort into an archaeological park. "I am

Since the Kangla Fort was handed over to state, no one has contacted me, says Prof Nalini Thakur

concerned equally about the preservation and the aspirations of the people," she told *The Indian Express*.

Even when the Fort was handed over to the state, the main apprehension was that 234 acres within the fort would be misused. Already half of the fort has been lost. Manipur Chief Minister O. Ibobi Singh had publicly announced that the Fort would be turned into an archaeological park as suggested by Thakur and his team.

What is possibly worse is that while the state government has con-

stituted a committee for reconstruction, neither Thakur nor any of her team members have either been included or informed about the same. "Though it could be argued that the state has recently taken over the Fort, there is a genuine apprehension that the reconstruction project is not going in the right direction," said a committee member.

Former Chief Town Planner of India and former SPA director, E.S.N. Ribero, who was also associated with the project, said: "the organisational acumen required to handle the project, that would preserve the architectural content and address the sentiments of people, is beyond the state government. I hope the PWD is not made the medium of execution." When contacted, Ibobi Singh, who is also a member of the Fort Committee, said: "I will have to check the details, but I guess Prof Thakur would be involved at a later stage."

INDIAN EXPRESS

25 JAN 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

MINISTERS TO REPRESENT GOVT

Centre-NSCN talks to resume Jan-end

Press Trust of India

Wokha lynching

NEW DELHI, Jan. 13. — Peace talks between the Centre and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (I-M) are scheduled to resume towards the end of this month.

Also, for the first time, the government is likely to be represented by a ministerial team.

"Talks are scheduled for later this month or early next month," senior NSCN (I-M) leader and outfit emissary Mr VS Atem said over phone from Nagaland. He said that during the talks, NSCN (I-M) will take up with the government its memorandum submitted earlier for a peaceful solution to the Naga problem.

When asked whether they would be talking to ministers of the UPA government, he said: "Most likely. But nothing has been conveyed to us as yet."

While NSCN (I-M) will

KOHIMA, Jan. 13. — An angry mob stormed a police station in Nagaland's Wokha district and lynched two persons, officials said today. Around 800 villagers forcibly entered the police station on Tuesday and severely assaulted the two who were allegedly taking refuge under police cover after they were accused of being responsible for the death of a youth. — PTI

be represented by Mr Isak Chishi Swu and Mr T Muivah, the government side is likely to include Central ministers of state Mr Oscar Fernandes, Mr Prithviraj Chauhan and Mr S Reghupaty. The Naga team will also be assisted by the home minister of Nagaland Mr R Rai Singh Atem.

The UPA government had committed itself to holding talks with Naga outfits in its common minimum programme.

Losing steam

Special Powers may stay in Manipur

Manipur's 32-party Apunba Lup agitation for the total withdrawal of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act seems to be losing momentum. Last November Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and home minister Shivraj Patil gave its working committee members a patient hearing but the organisation reportedly split soon after. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that some constituents are either tired of an agitation with no tangible results or thinks it is an exercise in futility after the Prime Minister's promise to appoint a review committee. But one cannot understand how, having won the people's confidence, they could cry off so easily. The anti-Act group is plodding on nevertheless and has revived its agitation from 10 December, though on a subdued note. Significantly, many defied its boycott call last month and pleaded their cases before the review committee members in Imphal.

What seems likely is that the Assam Rifles jawans involved in the 32-year-old Manorama Devi case, that triggered protests and brought out Apunba Lup, will never be punished and the Act, considered "draconian" by even the Prime Minister, may continue. The Army has conducted its own court of inquiry and the judicial probe report is awaited. Of late, there have been several clashes between the army and the rebels and the Centre is bound to take serious note of new GOC-in-C Eastern Command Lt-General Arvind Sharma's remarks that "without this special powers it would be impossible to counter insurgency". The review committee may arrive at an acceptable strategy but the best bet against misuse of the Act and the creation of more unpleasantness would be to strictly follow the Supreme Court's guidelines that severely restrict the powers enjoyed by the Army.