

Sikkim sets riders for Nathu La

AMITAVA Banerjee
Darjeeling, June 25

NATHU LA is not for all. Only Sikkim-based traders with a border-trade licence and related documents will be allowed to engage in trade through the mountain pass.

After days of intense speculation on the volume, contour and beneficiaries of trade through the historic corridor, Sikkim chief minister Pawan Chamling said on Sunday that for now, only Sikkim

subjects, permanent residents of Sikkim and people with land registered in their names or running a business in Sikkim would be issued trade passes.

Trading will be allowed in only 29 listed items. The licence, renewable every year against a fee of Rs 50, will be cancelled if any trader fails to engage in trade or if he has any adverse police report against him.

Quoting figures from a report by the Nathu-la Study Group, Chamling said the trade volume by 2010 would be in the range of Rs 353 crore. By 2015, it should grow to Rs 450 crore and by 2020 to Rs 575 crore. "Sikkim will earn revenue from licence fee, toll tax and charges from tourists," he said. The opening of cross-border trade would trigger a tourist boom, which would generate revenue worth Rs 181 lakh. The earnings from this sector could go up to Rs 347 lakh by 2010. The revenues from licence fee and toll tax would be Rs 81 lakh per year for the first five years but should go up to Rs 3 crore later on. A permit fee of Rs 50 would be levied on each vehicle entering Sikkim from China, Chamling said.

Every vehicle crossing into China from Sikkim will have to pay 5 yuans (Rs 25). On the opening day, July 6, 100 traders and 60 vehicles will be sent up to Nathu La. The names of the traders and the registration numbers of the vehicles will have to be enlisted with the industries ministry of Sikkim within July 1. This list will be forwarded to China by the Indian government. Cross-border trade through Nathu La would provide employment for more than 2,000 people, he added.

Commenting on Bengal eyeing a slice of the Nathu La trade cake, Chamling said, "The trade policy is laid down by the Centre and we will abide by its policies."



Tourists at Nathu La.

75 11. 2009

Beyond Nathu La: Sikkim shows the way

By Mahendra P Lama

THE reopening of the historic trade route between India and China through the Nathu la pass route in Sikkim on 6 July also reopens a vast range of possibilities and opportunities. This is more so for the neighbour-locked North-east region. This trade route reopening was an absolute impossibility even a decade back but four major factors have steadily converged to make this happen.

First, the farsightedness and dynamism of the Sikkimese political leadership. The consistent arguments of chief minister Pawan Chamling over the past decade led to the sensitising of all segments of Sikkimese society, bringing in knowledge and expertise to indicate potential gains. He absorbed criticism and sought to overwhelm politics by economics. His favourable political equation with the Centre backed by his positive image also boosted the prospects for its reopening.

Second, a significant realisation on the part of China that its national security could be ensured more durably through a policy of *mulin zhengce*, or better relations with *zhoubian guojia* (periphery countries). They gradually and successfully implemented this in the form of local integration in the Asia-Pacific and Central Asian regions. The growing warmth in its relations with India is part of this larger process of constructive and inclusive rapprochement, coinciding with India's burgeoning aspirations to be a major international actor.

Third, globalisation triggered opportunities and issues of market expansion and integration became a central theme in India-China relations. Thus, economic ties and compulsions of wider integration have opened the vistas of new approaches to resolve the longstanding boundary disputes.

Fourth, the development of a more realistic analysis and favourable

public opinion created by both national and local media.

Nowhere in India is the cross-border interaction for a group of states so critical and essential than to the North-east. This is on account of historical linkages, where over 98 per cent of the border is with neighbouring countries and more crucially the

Open Forum

has developed that thrives on this exclusive paradigm which has no future. People's dependence on the State has quadrupled even in areas where voluntarism was once the core to

fundamental difference between "us" in the North-east and "they" in the mainland in Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat. This social ethos of poor commercial assertion needs to be revisited.

The North-east is the foundation and a gateway of India's Look East Policy and initiatives like South Asia Growth Quad-

direction and volume of border trade show that there are ample markets. This also indicates that there is a parallel economy with a chain of service providers on both sides of the border.

An unregulated situation has essentially engendered parallel circuits of banking, insurance, supplies and other services. This has been used by inimical forces thereby generating a new security dynamics. Where are those political and civil society constituencies in the North-east that argue for regulating this trading practices through much more substantive interventions like cross border infrastructure projects, investments, service exchanges besides trading.

In addition, the chief ministers, private sector and other civil society organs of the region must unite to convince Bangladesh of the need for a transit route that could fetch the latter an estimated annual revenue of \$400 to 500 million. This will make the North-east market doubly accessible for Bangladeshi goods and help resolve the latter's trade deficit grievance with India. Besides reducing huge transaction/transport costs, it will be able to use Bangladeshi ports, go for industrial cooperation and even lead to gas trading.

The present distance of 1,645 km between Agartala and Kolkata via Siliguri was hardly 350 km through the then East Pakistan before Partition. Agartala is still 135 km away from the nearest Indian railhead whereas it is hardly four km from the railhead at Akhura in Bangladesh. The onus to rise and seize the opportunities is on the politicians, civil society and youth of the North-east.

Sikkim has shown the way and Nathu la is the symbol.

(The author is Chairman, South Asia Centre, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and leader of the Team of Experts, Nathu la Trade Report 2005.)



convenience and compulsions of multifaceted cross border intercourse. The efficiency gains of deeper and wider cross border interactions will outsmart economic stagnancy, social frustration and political inactions.

Unfortunately, till now, the security discourse has overwhelmed and vanquished the best economic arguments. For development and trade economists, the security argument is a vicious circle wherein the fundamental elements of regular economic practices and social exchanges become not only irrational but go beyond the public purview.

The North-east has at times been forcibly confined to this "security-development" paradigm over the past five decades. As a result, much of the region has become a bottomless pit as far as investment and flow of resources is concerned. More seriously a vested constituency

societal progress.

The biggest challenge to the region is to think big, look forward and to move in an integrative and inclusive framework. Besides other instruments of achieving this goal of an integrated economy, the most vital is to steadily reopen the borders for meaningful economic and commercial interactions. This would bring massive infrastructural developments, newer vistas of cooperation and more importantly newer players.

We must build the gas pipeline from Myanmar through the North-east and review the benefits: the use of gas through this pipeline could bring major structural changes. Why did not it happen earlier? Why is it delayed? The chief ministers of the region should have strongly lobbied for this pipeline in Delhi. They should have engaged the media and experts even for political mileage. This is the fun-

drangle (SAGQ) and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Techno-Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). However, the entire discourse is confined to a handful of intellectuals, former diplomats and research and donor agencies largely located in Delhi. Who is accountable for doing nothing on such a magnificently potential concept and initiatives? When will the people in the region wake up to grab the positive gains of globalisation and distance themselves from the status of a bamboo and pineapple economy? We find nothing happening in this regard in the North-east though it is the key stakeholder.

Border trade has met with the same fate. To what extent does border trade impinge upon security? How can we ignore the informal and even illegal trade of almost a billion dollars that takes place through these borders? The very nature,

26 JUN 2006

Ulfa on the backfoot ✓

Centre proves sincerity, ISI its sway

10/9/87 51-8 23/6

That the PMO did not postpone the third round of talks with the Ulfa-appointed People's Consultative Group despite a series of bomb blasts in Assam early this month is testimony to Delhi's determination to keep the peace process alive. In fact this has strengthened the Centre's hand and nailed the oft-repeated Ulfa contention that the former is not sincere in solving the problem. The Ulfa gave the impression of having mellowed when it refrained from violence before and during the assembly elections but that turned out to be deceptive. Now that Delhi has established that it will not compromise on the issue of sovereignty the ball is back in the Ulfa's court. It was only after the the PMO agreed to discuss this core issue the Ulfa appointed the PGC last September. Few will believe the Ulfa's denial of having had anything to do with the recent series of explosions that left at least six people dead and 50 injured. Only highly trained bomb experts can use such sophisticated devices and there is no dearth of this talent in Ulfa ranks. Even more ridiculous was the outfit's self-styled commander-in-chief, Paresh Barua, blaming the Assam police for engineering such explosions.

The Ulfa also had the cheek to threaten some senior editors and journalists of Assam. The fourth estate's prompt condemnation should leave it in no doubt that attempts to gag the press will not be tolerated. There is also little doubt about Ulfa losing public support through its mindless killings of civilians. This is something the people had not expected and is a proof of the outfit's graduation from insurgency to terrorism - which must be tackled accordingly. Every effort must be made to solve the problem, if necessary by conceding the demand for the release of some Ulfa leaders.

THE STATESMAN

Centre to consider plea for release of ULFA leaders

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Patil to work out modalities for direct talks with the insurgent group

Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI: The Centre on Thursday assured a group of United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) nominated negotiators that it would "consider favourably" their demand for the release of five top ULFA leaders.

The assurance was given by Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil at the third round of talks between the Government and the 11-member People's Consultative Group (PCG) here. Mr. Patil told the PCG that their request for freeing the five ULFA leaders would be considered favourably in consultation with the Assam Government.

The Minister also agreed to work out modalities through mutual consultations for holding direct talks with the outlawed insurgent group in a fixed timeframe. At the end of the talks, lasting about three hours, a brief joint statement was issued, expressing the hope that there would be restraint on all sides. The Centre-PCG talks were held in the backdrop of a recent spate of bomb blasts and explosions in Assam believed to have been engineered by ULFA activists.

"The Home Minister urged the PCG to impress upon ULFA to ensure a peaceful and conducive environment so that direct talks with the Government of India are held at the earliest," the joint statement said.



DISCUSSING PEACE: Home Minister Shivraj Patil talks to Indira Goswami (second from right), and other members of the People's Consultative Group of the United Liberation Front of Asom in New Delhi on Thursday.

- PHOTO: V. SUDERSHAN

It said that the PCG also expressed satisfaction over the Minister's approach to negotiations that would help usher lasting peace in Assam. "PCG also assured the Home Minister that they would appeal to the ULFA to create a peaceful atmosphere in Assam which will be conducive to holding direct talks," the statement said.

Besides Mr. Patil, National Security Adviser M.K. Narayanan, Home Secretary V.K. Duggal and other senior Home Ministry officials along with the Chief Secretary of Assam participated in the talks. Dr. Indira Goswami, emi-

nent Assamese writer and mediator, and 10 other members participated in the meeting on behalf of PCG.

Sources familiar with the PCG said the Centre, in consultation with the State Government, would consider the release of ULFA vice-chairman Pradip Go-

goi, cultural secretary Pranati Deka, publicity secretary Mithinga Daimary, executive committee member Ramu Mech and ideologue Bhimakanta Buragohain. Sources said the sole agenda of the PCG was to bring ULFA to the negotiating table.

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THE HINDU

23 JUL 2005

Hint of freedom for Ufa top guns

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, June 22

THE CENTRE on Thursday hinted at releasing five top Ufa leaders, setting the stage for direct talks with the outfit. Among the five is Pradeep Gogoi, who was arrested a few years ago from a Kolkata hotel. The others are publicity secretary Mithinga Daimary, Bhim Kanta Buragohain, Ramu Mech and Pranati Deka.

The home ministry made the announcement after a meeting Shivraj Patil had with Ufa intermediaries. It may well have been the last such meeting. Ministry officials said no formal talks would now be held with the intermediaries though the home ministry will be in touch with the group to finalise the modalities for a direct dialogue with Ufa. "The intermediaries have played a crucial role during the three rounds of talks in finding a



AFP
Job's over for Indira Goswami and her colleagues.

solution to violence in Assam," home secretary V.K. Duggal said.

Patil asked the 11 intermediaries, led by author Indira Goswami, to impress upon Ufa to exercise restraint so that a peaceful and conducive environ-

ment can be created in Assam for further dialogue. After the meeting, which lasted two-and-a-half hours, the two sides released a joint statement saying the intermediaries have "assured the home minister that it would appeal to Ufa to create a peaceful atmosphere in Assam, which will be conducive to holding direct talks."

Duggal said, "The government wants Ufa to maintain peace so that there is a favourable dialogue with it." On the timeframe for such talks, Duggal said, it "will be (started) at the earliest."

On the possibility of a ceasefire being announced by Ufa, a senior ministry official said the mediators were not authorised by the militant group to give an assurance on this.

The ceasefire, officials said, will have to be discussed directly with the Ufa. The mediators have been asked to get a fixed timeframe from the outfit for direct dialogue.

Govt behind blasts: ULFA, PCG

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP
GUWAHATI | JUNE 10

THE United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and the People's Consultative Group nominated by the ULFA have blamed the government for the series of blasts across the state that killed five people and injured several others yesterday.

"The explosions have been carried out by government agencies to derail the ongoing peace process," a statement e-mailed by the ULFA said. The outfit alleged that government intelligence agencies had already publicised that ULFA would strike at vital installations, even mentioning the Assam Police Special Branch IG by name in this connection.

The ULFA statement also named a few Guwahati-based journalists, including former editor of *The Sentinel* DN Bezboruah, saying they



had joined hands with the police and intelligence agencies in running a cam-

Members of the bomb disposal squad put away a time bomb in Guwahati on Saturday. The explosive was concealed in a tiffin box and planted in the busy Pan Bazaar area, city senior superintendent of police Nitul Gogoi said. 'The bomb was detected and defused minutes before it was to explode,' he said.

paign against the ULFA, aimed at derailing the ongoing peace process. The next round of talks are scheduled for June 22.

The 11-member PCG has also held the government responsible for the latest spate of violence in the state. "The government has to be held responsible for this renewed spate of violence. It was the government which pushed the ULFA to the wall by sitting on a decision to create a conducive atmosphere for peace talks by undertaking a series of confidence building measures," said Dilip Patgiri, a member of the PCG.

ULFA, on the other hand, had maintained "appreciable" restraint since January 26 following an assurance from the government that the confidence building measures would be undertaken, he added, "but the government has continued with repressive measures including several incidents in which security forces have killed a number of ULFA cadres".

Sikkim passes OoP Bill

▶ GANGTOK: The Sikkim Assembly on Saturday passed a Bill preventing disqualification of its legislators for holding offices of profit.

The Bill, passed on the last day of a two-day special session, amends the Sikkim Legislative Assembly Members (Removal of Disqualification) Act of 1978 to add a few more offices to the ones already enumerated. The Assembly session was convened after the Opposition Congress, BJP and Sikkim Himali Rajya Parishad (SHRP) last month accused 17 MLAs of the ruling SDF of holding offices of profit. Replying to Opposition charges that the Act was unconstitutional, Law Minister RB Subba said Articles 246 and 191 of the Constitution empowered the legislature to make laws.

— PTI

INDIAN EXPRESS

1 JUN 2006

Five persons killed in Guwahati blast

48 injured in explosions, ULFA hand suspected

Special Correspondent

GUWAHATI: Five persons were killed and 48 injured in serial blasts that took place in different parts of the State since Thursday night.

The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) is suspected to be behind the explosions.

In the city, five persons died and at least 20 were injured, two of them seriously, when an explosive device went off at the wholesale vegetable market at Machkhowa around 4.15 p.m. on Friday.

City Senior Superintendent of Police Nitul Gogoi told *The Hindu* that the blast was caused by a time-delay device. On Thursday, 28 people were injured in four blasts at Dhubri,

• **Explosion in wholesale market on Friday, injures 20**

• **Four blasts on Thursday night, 28 injured**

Golokganj, Mangaldoi and Haibargaon.

The ULFA is yet to claim responsibility for the blasts. But Inspector-General of Police Khagen Sharma said the self-styled commander of ULFA's 28 Battalion, Mrinal Hazarika, who was arrested recently, had revealed that ULFA chief Paresh Barua had ordered all battalions to carry out attacks from June 9 to 11.

Assamese writer Indira Goswami, who has been facilitating

discussions between the ULFA-formed People's Consultative Group (PCG) and the Centre, told reporters in New Delhi that the Centre was willing to release the leaders to hold direct talks. The ULFA chief had demanded the release of the outfit's central committee members.

After meeting National Security Adviser M.K. Narayanan and Union Home Secretary V.K. Duggal, Dr. Goswami said the next round of talks had been fixed for June 22. Mr. Narayanan had agreed to be present at the meeting to be presided over by Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil.

See also Page 12

10 JUN 2006

THE HINDU

Questions of peace in Assam

The deadly chain of violence set off in Assam over the past few days — the handiwork of the United Liberation Front of Asom, by all accounts — poses challenges for the peace process under way to end insurgency in the State. In the classic terrorist tradition, ULFA has blamed state intelligence agencies for the violence against civilians — including the June 9 explosion in Guwahati that left five persons, mostly vegetable vendors, dead. But it owned up the attacks on vital oil installations. Serial blasts have been ULFA's trademark tactic. Coming as they do ahead of talks scheduled for June 22, they can only be seen as holding a gun to the Government's head. Significantly, the violence started soon after the Union Home Secretary set the date for the talks and conveyed it to the People's Consultative Group (PCG), the team of interlocutors deployed by ULFA in September 2005 to work out a mutually acceptable peace process. The dialogue between the Centre and the PCG was expected to lead to a bilateral ceasefire agreement — however reluctant ULFA has traditionally been to be drawn into one — leading to direct talks. The previous rounds, held in October 2005 and in February 2006, created a somewhat optimistic atmosphere. ULFA was supposed to be looking forward to the next round while repeatedly pressing its demand for the release of five high-ranking insurgent leaders in government custody — making it sound like a precondition for talks. Despite the provocations, the Government has confirmed that the June 22 round will be held. The violence, however, has raised new questions about the secessionist outfit's sincerity of purpose as well as its ability to keep *agents provocateurs* within its ranks reined in. One factor that might have provoked ULFA to demonstrate its ability to strike terror and kill is a survey attributed to the PCG, which showed that less than one per cent of the people of Assam now support ULFA and its cause.

Any opportunity to break the spiral of violence in north-eastern India is welcome. The latest terror strikes do not, in any way, detract from the larger reality: ordinary people have become weary of the insurgencies, the senseless killings and destruction of property; and the state clearly has the upper hand and has no reason to give in to tactics of violence and intimidation. New Delhi should play a steady hand, adopting a principled and consistent line while dealing with the panoply of regional outfits (one recent count put the number at over a hundred, with some 30 of them engaged in insurgency). Just as there can be no giving in to terror tactics, there must be no succumbing to efforts to sabotage the peace process. On its part, the Congress-led Government of Assam needs to end complacency: the latest terror strikes speak to a failure of intelligence and a lowering of guard.

12 JUN 2006

THE HINDU

Denial syndrome

Centre must heed Ulfa duplicity

9. 11. 06
5-8
176

ULFA's reported denial of having had anything to do with last week's explosions over three consecutive days that killed six people and injured about 50 must be taken with a pinch of salt. It has no credibility. Remember, it even denied any hand in the 2004 Dhemaji Independence Day blast that left 13 dead, including some schoolchildren. Civilians and oil and gas pipelines are increasingly being targeted, clearly signs of terrorism, and if the Centre takes no heed of the latest developments then Assam is bound to go the Kashmir way. That the People's Consultative Group has reportedly appealed to the very outfit that appointed it to eschew violence is tacit admission of who the perpetrators are. Assamese facilitator Indira Raisom Goswami, though, does not seem to agree and remains noncommittal. Apart from Ulfa, there is no other organisation that can be suspected since another militant group, the National Democratic Front of Boroland, is observing a truce with the Centre and would not jeopardise the peace process by indulging in such murderous activities.

The Assam police is said to be on alert following Intelligence reports of impending Ulfa attacks last week. Ulfa's prestigious 28 battalion commander Mrinal Hazarika, who was nabbed in Siliguri recently, is also said to have revealed such plans. But terrorists are friendly, smiling people until they wreak havoc. If the latest blasts were intended to strengthen the outfit's bargaining point before the third round of PCG-PMO talks some time this month, or is a message of what to expect if negotiations fail, it must be made clear that there will be no deal until it gives up violence. Defence minister Pranab Mukherjee is right that there is no precondition that jailed Ulfa leaders must be released before talks. The demand was an afterthought and was not mentioned in chairman Arbinda Rajkhowa's letter to the PMO - he merely wanted talks on sovereignty and the Centre agreed. But if the release helps facilitate talks there is no reason why it cannot be considered, though strictly on condition that they will be constantly under state surveillance to ensure they do not disappear as most top leaders did in 1993.

13 JUN 2006

THE STATESMAN

HOPES AND FEARS

Religious rituals are part of public life in many areas in the North-east. The 'special prayers' in Manipur's churches for the success of the Naga peace talks were a different matter though. The prayers reflected a hope. More important, they also signalled a fear. The talks which are to resume in Amsterdam next week have been somewhat clouded by uncertainties of late. The Naga leaders are known to have become rather restive. The point of the prayers, however, is that the people do not want the talks to fail. Their desire for peace outweighs the problems New Delhi and the Naga interlocutors face in resolving some of the complex issues. This clearly is the most important message from the prayers. No matter how intractable some issues may appear, the people in Manipur and in Nagaland would not like either side to walk out of the peace process. The peace initiative that began in 1997 is not simply a matter of extending the ceasefire every year. Its most significant contribution is the hope that Nagaland will not return to the tragic days of insurgency. Nothing should be allowed to destroy that hope.

The rebels' demand for the integration of all Naga-inhabited areas has long proved to be the most difficult challenge for the peacemakers. For the Nagas, the issue is central to their idea of an ethnic identity. They actually want this territorial question to determine the identity of the Naga 'nation'. From New Delhi's point of view, this is the most difficult demand to meet because such a course would involve a reorganization of the boundaries of several states in the region. A tentative plan to this effect by the previous government at the Centre led to a violent protest in Manipur. New Delhi needs to be extremely careful in dealing with the issue. A solution will depend primarily on a spirit of mutual accommodation. Not only the Nagas but also other ethnic groups faced problems of territorial identities because of historical reasons. It is not easy for the state to rewrite either the history or the geography of the region. It is often necessary to right the wrongs of history in deference to the popular will. The task before New Delhi is to solve the territorial problem in a manner that would be acceptable to both the Nagas and the Meiteis of Manipur. The Naga leaders too cannot afford to ignore the sentiments of other ethnic groups. The main challenge in Amsterdam will be to revive the spirit of mutual trust.

1 1 MAY 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

12 MAY 2001

THE TELEGRAPH

Comeback hinges on former militant Gogoi's good luck

A STAFF REPORTER

Guwahati, May 11: A former militant leader became an unlikely kingmaker after the elections in Assam threw up a hung Assembly.

The ruling Congress ended up with only 53 seats in its kitty, 18 less than its 2001 tally, but still locked on course to forming the next government with the support of the Bodo People's Progressive Front (BPPF) of Hagrama Mohilary, who had previously led the militant Bodo Liberation Tigers.

The Congress's position of strength had as much to do with the Asom Gana Parishad's flop show — it did increase its seat count from 20 to 24 but that was small consolation for a party hoping to form the government — as with the strategic pre-poll alliance with the BPPF.

"I was confident of forming the government and we will form the government now," chief minister Tarun

Congress ahead in hung Assam

these seats were wrested from the Congress. However, the role it was expected to play in government formation in the event of a fractured verdict has been hijacked by the BPPF.

For the Congress, satisfaction came not just from its unexpected situation of strength but also its performance in the tea belt. The party won in most of the constituencies dominated by the tea tribes, who were supposed to have been disenfranchised with the Gogoi government for various reasons.

The BJP improved on its 2001 performance by two seats, taking its tally to 10. One of the surprise gains for the party

was debutant Prasanta Phukan's victory by a slender margin in Dibrugarh, a seat that the Congress had always won.

Former chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta retained the Borthampur seat, but his AGP (Pragatisheel) was routed. Mahanta had contested the Nagaon seat, too, but lost the race.

Like Mahanta, AGP president Brindaban Goswami retained Tezpur and lost Borcholla. As many as five ministers lost the elections, as did PCC chief Bhubaneswar Kalita.

The Congress swept most of the Upper Assam districts and by and large held on to its position in the Barak Valley, North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong. The erosion of support for the party was in the minorities-dominated central Assam district of Nagaon and pockets of Lower Assam.

A STAFF REPORTER

Guwahati, May 11: A road that had appeared bumpy suddenly looks smooth for Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi.

After being almost written off, Gogoi is now poised to retain the hot seat with the Congress's 53 seats making it the single largest party in a House of 126, the support of at least 12 Bodo legislators assured and "challenger" Bhubaneswar Kalita out of the way.

Although AICC leader Digvijay Singh said the next chief minister would be chosen only at the Congress Legislature Party meeting on Saturday and Gogoi promised to "happily" shoulder any re-

sponsibility given to him, there was little to indicate that someone other than the incumbent would make the cut.

Singh and his AICC colleague Chandan Bagchi, who arrived in Guwahati just after Gogoi's resounding victory in Tabor was confirmed, drove straight to the chief minister's hilltop residence instead of dropping by at the party headquarters, Rajiv Bhawan. Congratulatory calls from Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress president Sonia Gandhi came in by 2 pm.

Among the other callers were MP Mani Kumar Subba and Robin Bordoloi, neither of them known to be particularly fond of him.

A beaming Gogoi said he always knew that the Congress would beat the anti-incumbency factor.

"I have never hankered after any post and will do whatever is asked of me. More than the chief ministership, I am excited about our party returning to power despite predictions to the contrary," he said.

"It is a vote for continuity, development and sincerity. I always knew we were on course. I have full faith in the people."

Kalita, the state Congress chief who lost in Rangla, said he had taken his defeat "sportingly", but ruled out stepping down from his post.



Tarun Gogoi (top) and Bhubaneswar Kalita

Congress seeks Bodo front support

Hagrama demands five berths

Sushanta Talukdar

GUWAHATI: The Congress on Friday sought the support of the Bodoland People's Progressive Front (BPPF-Hagrama Mahillary faction) in the formation of a coalition government in Assam.

Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi invited BPPF (Hagrama) president and chief of the Bodoland Territorial Council, Hagrama Mahillary, and deputy chief, Chandan Brahma, for a breakfast meeting at his official residence and sought their support for the formation of the next government. The meeting was attended by AICC general secretary in-charge of Asom, Digvijay Singh, and AICC secretary Chandan Bagchi.

Later, Mr. Mahillary told presspersons that his party demanded five berths — three Cabinet and two Ministers of State — in lieu of support for the formation of a Congress-led government.

He also demanded that his party be given the post of deputy chief minister and the Home portfolio.

CLP to meet today

The Congress Legislature Party (CLP) is scheduled to meet on Saturday to elect its leader. The BPPF (Hagrama) is also scheduled to meet on the same day to elect its leader and finalise the list of five names to be submitted to the Congress for ministerial berths.

In the Assembly elections, the Congress won 53 seats, while the BPPF (Hagrama) got 12. Their combined strength is one more than the magic number of 64 in the 126-member Lower House.

Unanimous choice

Congress sources said Mr. Gogoi was likely to be elected unanimously at the CLP meeting, which they described as a mere formality. Mr. Digvijay Singh and Mohsina Kidwai, observer, would be present.

A senior Congress MLA said efforts were on to enlist the support of independents to ensure that the Government was not entirely dependent on the BPPF (Hagrama). Sources said that after the CLP meeting, Mr. Gogoi would go to Raj Bhavan with the signatures of at least 74 MLAs, including the Congress, the BPPF (Hagrama) and some 10 independents. The independents, including five Congress rebel candidates, won 11 seats.

He is then likely to leave for Delhi to get the approval of Congress president Sonia Gandhi for the list of legislators to be included in the new ministry. The size of the ministry, including the Chief Minister, cannot exceed 19.

The sources said the other possible aspirants for the post of chief minister such as PCC president Bhubaneswar Kalita, the former Power Minister, Devanand Konwar, and Transport Minister Anjan Dutta were out of contention.

13 MAY 2006

THE HINDU

Gogoi stakes claim

Bodo front makes a condition

Sushanta Talukdar

GUWAHATI: Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi on Saturday evening called on Governor Lt. Gen. (retd.) Ajay Singh and staked claim to form a coalition government. Earlier in the day, he was unanimously re-elected Congress Legislature Party leader.

Mr. Gogoi will be sworn in on Sunday. He is scheduled to leave for Delhi to meet Congress President Sonia Gandhi immediately after taking oath.

Swearing in

Sources in Raj Bhavan said other Ministers would be sworn in after Mr. Gogoi's return.

Mr. Gogoi submitted a list of 72 legislators along with their signatures to the Governor. They included 53 Congress legislators, 12 from the Bodoland People's Progressive Front (Hagrama faction), one from the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and six independents.

Before leaving for Raj Bhavan, Mr. Gogoi said at joint press conference with BPPF (Hagrama) president Hagrama Mahillary the Union Cabinet had given ap-

proval for a Rs. 5,460-crore Assam Gas Cracker project.

The Bodo front toned down its earlier demand for five berths but came up with a condition that all the clauses of the Bodo accord signed by the erstwhile Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) with the Centre and the State Government must be implemented.

Not rigid

"We are not rigid about the berths in the Ministry. But we want that the Bodo accord implemented in toto. More than the berths, implementation of the accord is more important," said Mr. Mahillary.

The accord brought to an end the armed struggle by the BLT for creation of a separate state of Bodoland and also the over ground statehood movement by the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU).

Asked about the demands of the coalition partner, Mr. Gogoi was non-committal but said his party had the best of relations with the BPPF and would discuss them. "Let us take oath first. We will discuss them."

Winning margin in Tamil Nadu was 4.67% points

The gap between the winning and losing alliances in the 2006 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections was 4.67 percentage points.

The DMK-led Democratic Progressive Alliance won 163 seats on the strength of a vote share of 44.73 per cent while the AIADMK front took 69 seats on the basis of a vote share of 40.06 per cent. Vijayakant's Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam scored 8.38 per cent in its debut election.

The table presented below has been compiled by the CSDS Data Unit from the final results for the 234 constituencies published on the Election Commission website.

Tamil Nadu Assembly election results 2006

VOTER TURNOUT				70.8%
PARTIES	CONTESTED	WON	VOTE(%)	
DMK +	234	163	44.73	
DMK	132	96	26.45	
Congress	48	34	8.38	
PMK	31	18	5.65	
CPI (M)	13	9	2.64	
CPI	10	6	1.61	
AIADMK +	234	69	40.06	
AIADMK	188	61	32.64	
MDMK	35	6	5.98	
DPI/VCK	9	2	1.29	
JD (S)	1	0	0.07	
Ind. (AIADMK)	1	0	0.08	
OTHERS				
DMDK	232	1	8.38	
BJP	225	0	2.02	
BSP	164	0	0.79	
Independents & other parties	1497	1	4.29	

THE HINDU

14 MAY 2006

~~15 MAY 2006~~

14 MAY 2006

Naga rallies in Manipur to build up pressure on talks

KARTYK VENKATRAMAN
SENAPATI, MAY 13

THOUSANDS of Nagas across the four districts dominated by them in Manipur took out rallies today reiterating their demand for integration of Naga inhabited areas in a buildup to the next round of talks between the NSCN (IM) and the Centre. The talks are slated to be held in Amsterdam on May 18.

The rallies organised by the United Naga Council (UNC) stressed on the need to integrate all Naga areas across Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam under one administrative roof, Nagalim.

Probably the largest show of strength was in Senapati district, bordering Nagaland and considered to be the main centre of operations for the Naga leadership in Manipur. Around 5,000 school children, women and men took part in the rally that was addressed by several Nagaland-



A protest rally in Senapati district.

Courtesy: Iramdam

based leaders, including the Naga Hoho president and the Naga Students' Federation vice-president.

"This rally expresses the aspirations and vision of the Nagas. Eight-and-a-half years of ceasefire is going nowhere. Nagas should be allowed to decide for themselves, and integration of our lands is very important. Time has come for the Indian government to be very sincere and make up

their political will," UNC president Paul Leo said.

He also said that during the last round of talks in Bangkok, which resulted in a six-month extension of the truce from January 31 onwards, the Indian side admitted to lack of progress. "At the last talks, attended by me as well, both sides were to meet once a month, but the upcoming round of talks is the first since the ceasefire extension."

14 MAY 2006

INDIAN EXPRESS

From guns to govt, Bodos have come a long way

Prabin Kalita | TNN

Guwahati: They waged a bloody war for seven long years against the government to create a separate state of Bodoland along the northern banks of the Brahmaputra. Three years after renouncing violence, the men who roamed with weapons and planned attacks on forces, are now set to join the government.

The dreaded Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), disbanded three years ago, killed 291 civilians and 21 securitymen in the seven years of terror. They shot into limelight with the bombing of the New Delhi-Brahmaputra Mail in '96, killing 34 people. This is the second instance of ex-militants joining government in the militancy-infested north-



ROSY WELCOME: BPPF chief Hagrama Mohilary being felicitated in Guwahati after his party won 11 seats in Assam

east. Zoramthanga's Mizo National Front gave up arms to form the government in Mi-

zoram more than two decades ago. With 11 seats, the Bodos saved the day for Congress by

promising support, albeit with a long list of demands. Bodoland People's Progressive Front (BPPF) chief Hagrama Mohilary, known to be the only commander of any guerrilla group to lead from the front, appears to have matured as a politician, realising the Bodos would get a better deal if he staked a claim to some of the most powerful offices.

"We wanted to be part of the government. The Bodos, or for that matter, any indigenous tribal group in the state has always been deprived of a say in government formation," Mohilary said. The former militant group tasted democratic power after the Bodoland Territorial Council was created in 2003. Today, Mohilary and his men talk only of development.

14 MAY 2006

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Facilitating Centre-Ulfa talks tops Gogoi agenda

Special News Service

GUWAHATI, May 20. — The new Congress-led coalition government in Assam has decided to accord top priority to the prolonged insurgency problem by playing the role of a catalyst in bringing about direct talks between the ultras and the Centre.

The chief minister, Mr Tarun Gogoi, today said his first target was to facilitate direct negotiations between the two militant groups — the banned Ulfa and the National Democratic Front

of Bodoland (NDFB) — and the Centre. “The new government would do everything possible to restore peace in the state. Restoration of lasting peace is essential for us to achieve socio-economic development goals,” Mr Gogoi said.

Besides carrying forward the development initiative of the previous government, Mr Gogoi iterated, focus of the new government would be on employment oriented economic development, upgradation of technical and professional education through

‘Arrests defeat Assam govt purpose’ ^{7/5} ^{9/15/03}

SILIGURI, May 20. — Urging respectful treatment towards arrested Ulfa leader Mr Plaban Phukan alias Mrinal Hazarika and his three accomplices who were arrested in Siliguri hotels on Wednesday, Mr Phukan’s lawyer Mr Bijan Kumar Mahajan today said here that the arrests could disrupt the Assam government’s proposal to release some Ulfa leaders held in Assam jails. Apart from Phukan, three others Bulen Prasad Sahu alias Balaj Das alias Mahesh Gupta, Dulal Saikia alias Pradip Sharma and Moni Barua alias Jagat Barua were arrested by Siliguri police on Wednesday. **SNS**

public-private participation, luring foreign fund in the state. The situation improved a lot during the last five years and what needed now is permanent

Mr Gogoi hoped that the next round of negotiation between the Ulfa-nominated People’s Consultative Group (PCG) and the Centre would be held soon.

Regarding the Ulfa’s demand for release of its senior members, Mr Gogoi said: “The state government is ‘agreeable’ to release of jailed Ulfa leaders who are detained under National Security Act. We have informed the Centre about it.” He, however, refused to specify the Ulfa leaders whose release

would be acceptable to the government.

Five top Ulfa leaders including its vice-chairman Pradip Hazarika, adviser Bhimkanta Buragohain, cultural secretary Pranati Deka, publicity secretary Mithinga Dai-mari and central committee leader Ramu Mech are now detained in Guwahati jail under NSA Act. The Ulfa commander-in-chief Paresh Baruah had earlier demanded their release.

At least three other central executive members of the outfit including

Ashanta Baghpukon and Bening Rabha had gone missing after the Operation All Clear launched by the Royal Bhutan Army to evict the Ulfa base from Bhutan in December 2003.

In another development, the drilling engineer of the Oil India Limited Mr K Mohan Rao who was abducted by suspected Ulfa militants last night from the OIL oilfield at Barekuriah was rescued by a joint team of Army and police from a neighbouring locality in the wee hours today.

Another Ulfa ultra held

22/5 RB 8 517
Statesman News Service

SILIGURI, May 21: Close on the heels of arrest of four United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) militants from Siliguri, police today arrested one more hardcore Ulfa militant from Naxalbari and a linkman of the banned outfit from Medical More here.

Bijoy Kalita, a member of the 28 Battalion of Ulfa and Subrata Paul, an Ulfa linkman, were arrested today after information received from the four Ulfa militants, who were arrested on Wednesday, the North Bengal IG, Mr KL Meena, said.

Mr Meena said that they came to know about the presence of more Ulfa militants in Siliguri after collecting pointers from the cell phone of Minal Hazarika, the commander-in-charge of 28 battalion of Ulfa who is in police custody here. "We have information that some more Ulfa linkmen are active in and around Siliguri, especially in the Bhaktinagar police station area," a senior police official said.

Some important documents and three cell phones were recovered from the duo.

22 MAY 2006

THE STATESMAN

22 MAY 2004

THE TELEGRAPH

Muivah flashes arms threat at Delhi 'double standards'

BHARAT BHUSHAN

Amsterdam, May 21: Threatening to pick up arms once again if Delhi continued making attempts to undermine his organisation, Thuingaleng Muivah, general secretary of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah), described such a policy as "treacherous".

While defending the activities of his organisation and extolling its "commitment to a peaceful solution", the Naga leader adopted an accusatory tone towards India. He alleged that Delhi lacked sincerity of purpose.

"I told the Indian delegation that there is no problem

from our side. We are committed to a peaceful solution and we honour our commitments. The problem is on their side. India does not honour its commitments. Even while dealing with us, it is helping other groups to erode our position. Is this the way to proceed with peace talks?" he asked.

He also accused Delhi of "double standards" in dealing with the NSCN (IM).

"When the Nagas are coming forward step by step, is it wise of India to drive them back? Indians have to think this through very carefully," he said.

Delhi, he said, should realise that "if its forces go on killing our cadre, betray their

commitment to ceasefire and its ground rules, go on supporting the traitors against us, then the Nagas will be compelled to fight back."

The Naga leader warned: "Supporting others to undermine us is a treacherous policy. We will not hesitate to take up arms if forced by Government of India's policies."

What about the NSCN (IM)'s policy of dealing with foreign powers and associating with anti-India groups?

"Trying to contain the fallout of the NSCN (IM)'s latest diplomatic forays abroad, Muivah claimed that India was being "unnecessarily critical".

"We sent our men to brief

saying that the Nagas were committed to a peaceful resolution of their conflict with India.

"In every international forum, we make our commitment clear — that efforts must continue for a peaceful settlement. We seek support (internationally) for peaceful negotiations. We do not advocate violence unless it is used against us," he said.

Muivah claimed that the conference in London that was organised by the Parliamentarians for National Self-Determination passed a resolution for peaceful end to all such conflicts. "We support peaceful resolution of all conflicts in India — whether in

Kashmir or anywhere else. Is that wrong?" he asked.

"So the government of India should not selectively pick up certain issues and blow them out of proportion. Instead an attempt should be made to understand us correctly," he advised.

The Naga leader admitted that Michael C. van Walt, the Dutch facilitator, had submitted some proposals for consideration of the two sides. Without revealing what they were, he said: "We are studying them and so is the Indian side. Any suggestion for a peaceful and honourable solution is acceptable to us. This is our policy and I told the Indian negotiators this."

The Naga leader expressed his admiration for constitutional law expert Yash Ghai from Hong Kong University.

"We had meetings with him because we want to be enlightened about various kinds of constitutions that exist in the world. He is a renowned international expert on constitutional law. We appreciate his vast knowledge and wisdom. I admire his attitude because he also seeks peaceful solutions," Muivah said.

Had the Nagas sought his help in understanding the Indian Constitution or in drawing up their own constitution?

Muivah denied any such discussion. "We did not discuss the Naga issue with him."



When the Nagas are coming forward step by step, is it wise of India to drive them back?

— **THUINGALENG MUIVAH**

our representatives did in London and in China," he explained after being cautioned by India against such activities.

The Naga leader sought to underplay the incidents,

Insurgency to democracy

Bijay Sankar Bora

GUWAHATI, May 22: History has a habit of repeating itself. A once-wanted insurgency leader, Mr Hagrama Mohilary, is now poised to play a role in mainstream politics in the plains of Assam. In doing so, he will be following in the footsteps of Mr Pu Zoramthanga, who, two decades earlier, heralded a new era in the blue hills of Mizoram.

If Mr Mohilary's belligerence as chief of the now-disbanded Bodo Liberation Tigers caused mindless violence and bloodshed in the Bodo heartland of Assam late in the 1990s, Mr Zoramthanga had played a major role when Laldenga, commander-in-chief of the rebel Mizo National Front, fought the Indian security forces between 1966 and 1986.

They were among rebel leaders in the region who led their men from the front in a "war zone" unlike their brethren in other outfits who, living abroad in luxury, remote-controlled "operations" in their "homeland," exposing their hierarchically lower comrades to danger. There are many more similarities between Mr Mohilary, leader of the Bodoland People's Progressive Front (Hagrama) and the Mizoram chief minister and MNF leader, Mr Zoramthanga.

Both led efforts to form political parties after signing peace accords with the Union government once they realised the futility of armed combat.

Mr Zoramthanga is now Mizoram's chief minister for a second term while Mr Mohilary is Assam's kingmaker. Without the support of the 12 MLAs loyal to the BPPF (H) led by Mr Mohilary, the Congress could not have retained power by winning only 53 seats in a 126-member House.

Just as Mr Zoramthanga was instrumental in turning the rebel MNF into a political party after the signing of the Mizo peace accord with the Centre in 1986, Mr Mohilary took the lead in setting up the BPPF(H), which took in former BLT rebels, after the signing of the Bodo peace accord in 2003.

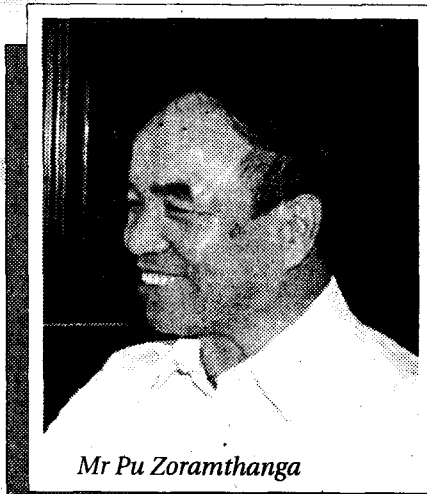
Mr Zoramthanga has shown how a rebel leader can turn a violence-affected state into an island of peace. Mizoram was given a peace bonus of more than Rs 180 crore by the National Democratic Alliance government in New Delhi.

Because of Mr Mohilary and his party, Bodos are going to have a say in the policy-making process in Dispur, a feat never achieved by any of the tribes in the state since Independence.

Rulers

- Zoramthanga and Mohilary led efforts to form political parties after signing peace accords with the Union government
- Zoramthanga turned the rebel MNF into a political party
- Mohilary set up the BPPF(H) with former Bodo Liberation Tigers rebels
- Zoramthanga is now Mizoram's chief minister for a second term
- Mohilary is Assam's king maker

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Mr Pu Zoramthanga

Rebels

- Mizoram's Pu Zoramthanga had played a major role when Laldenga, commander-in-chief of the rebel Mizo National Front, fought the Indian security forces between 1966 and 1986
- Assam's Hagrama Mohilary is a once-wanted insurgency leader chief Bodo Liberation Tigers caused mindless violence and bloodshed in the Bodo heartland in the 1990s

Mr Hagrama Mohilary

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Signals on the Naga front

Considering that no breakthrough was on the cards anyway, the May 19-20 round of talks in Amsterdam between the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Mui-vah) has not been a total disappointment. Both sides have agreed to meet "frequently" to find an "honourable" solution. Another round is expected soon, although no formal statement has been forthcoming. The future of the ceasefire that has been in place since August 1997 — the latest six-month extension is to expire on July 31 — is of immediate concern. With regard to the contentious issues, it is clear that the Government has major constraints when it comes to the demand for a unification of the "Naga-inhabited areas," which include parts of Assam, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh. The other demands, including for symbols of sovereignty, are patently untenable. Even as signs of a desire for sustained peace are in sight on the ground, there is evidence of growing impatience among some sections. The Naga Hoho, the apex tribal council of the Nagas, in a memorandum submitted to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, spoke of concern over "the delay[ing] tactics and non-committal diplomacy" of the Government and of "the imminent bloodshed and violence that will follow in Naga areas." At the end of the seemingly endless debate is the question: who will blink first?

It is important to keep talking, and the process going. What is needed is a step-by-step movement — it is unrealistic to expect a solution overnight. Oscar Fernandes, the Centre's point man for the talks, has spoken of a solution in terms of a "package" that would respond to the demands point by point. A periodic extension of the ceasefire without conclusive political action can hardly be seen as a positive trend, and may well buttress the impression of a strategy of buying time. To make any progress, both parties should show a greater flexibility and accommodation than they have displayed so far. Admittedly, there are still several options for both to look at seriously. Different models could be projected in a transparent manner for Naga civil society groups to consider. There is a case for seeking an interim solution pending a final settlement. Meanwhile, India should continue to take a firm stand against any third-party mediation. Also, the question whether a deal with the NSCN (I-M) alone will solve the problem once and for all, and how far the group represents Naga opinion in its totality, needs to be considered afresh. Groups such as the Naga Hoho should work to unify the Naga factions in order that they could talk peace with New Delhi on a common platform. Continued recriminatory killings among the rival underground factions are a matter of concern too. Only a set of bold and unorthodox steps can end insurgency in the Naga heartland. These should seek to give due recognition to the unique history and situation of the Naga people.

29 MAY 2006

THE HINDU

Ulfa wants direct talks

13A
 J.P.G. Sankar Bora

Bijay Sankar Bora

GUWAHATI, April 14: The Ulfa-nominated People's Consultative Group (PCG) has warned that the peace initiative with the banned militant group will break down unless the Centre expedites the process to include Ulfa leaders in direct negotiations.

leaders in direct negotiations.

With the election to the 12th Assam Assembly well over now, and the state awaiting the formation of a new government at Dispur, the negotiators for Ulfa have called for renewed attention on the peace process with the banned militant group. Meanwhile, Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa in an e-mailed statement sent on the occasion of *Bohag Bihu*, the Spring festival in Assam, called upon people of all sections in Assam to shed differences to welcome the Assamese New Year and take a fresh vow in favour of the ongoing struggle to "liberate motherland Assam".

A member of the



Arabinda Rajkhowa



Arabinda Rajkhowa

■ The Ulfa-nominated People's Consultative Group (PCG) has warned that the peace initiative will break down unless the Centre expedites the process to include Ulfa leaders in direct negotiations

■ The PCG seems to be ignoring the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh's statement ruling out discussion on Ulfa's demand for sovereignty

■ The government seems to be dragging the peace process, the PCG says.

Such an approach is not acceptable to Ulfa

■ The PCG expects the Centre to announce the next date of negotiation after the election results are declared next month

■ Ulfa adopted a neutral stand during the Assam Assembly poll recently

■ The group of the Ulfa-nominated negotiators hopes that the next state government would adopt a positive attitude towards bringing the Ulfa into direct negotiation with the Centre

PCG and human rights activist, Mr Lachit Bardoloi told the Statesman: "There is possibility of a break down in the peace process if the Union government fails to accelerate it in the right direction. The government should show more sincerity to translate its verbal commitment to find a political solution to the Ulfa problem through dialogue. The PCG is under the impression that the Central government is not clear on how to approach the problem and has failed to impart momentum to the process. Like in the case of prolonged dialogue with the NSCN-IM, the government seems to be more interested in dragging the process. Such an approach is not acceptable," he said.

The PCG, it seems, has decide to ignore the Prime

Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh's statement made here on 1 March ruling out discussion on the Ulfa's demand for sovereignty, although he had expressed the government's inclination to find a solution to the problem through negotiation to restore peace in the state.

"We have read the Prime Minister's statement in the newspaper. We don't want to form any opinion about it as we still believe in what he had told us during discussions," the PCG member said.

The group of the Ulfa-nominated negotiators hopes that the next government in the state would adopt a positive attitude towards bringing the Ulfa into direct negotiation with the Central government for finding a permanent solution to the problem. The banned out-

fit chose to maintain a neutral stand during the just concluded election in the state and the PCG has termed it as a positive indication from the outfit towards carrying forward the peace process. The chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi too had expressed his gratitude to insurgents for not trying to disrupt the election process. The by and large smooth election process witnessed over 75% polling.

The PCG expects the Centre to announce the next date of negotiation after the election results are declared next month. So far, two rounds of negotiation have been held between the PCG and representatives of the Union government. The ball was set rolling by the Prime Minister himself in the first round of talks held last year.

"Assam polls a pointer to new front"

History will be rewritten if AGP wins, say Mulayam and Naidu

Sushanta Talukdar

TEZPUR: The Assembly election results in Assam and Tamil Nadu will provide pointers to building up a non-Congress, non-BJP alternative in the country, leaders of the Samajwadi Party and the Telugu Desam said on Friday.

The Assam election would rewrite the country's history if the regional party, Asom Gana Parishad, was voted to power and the Congress defeated, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and the former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, said here.

They were addressing an election rally in the hometown of AGP president Brindaban Goswami.

Earlier in Guwahati, Mr. Yadav, replying to a question whether he foresaw mid-term polls, said there would be a big change after the Assam Assembly elections.

In Tezpur, amidst a thunderous applause, he appealed to the voters to give the "would-be Chief Minister," Mr. Goswami, a landslide victory.

A threat

Mr. Yadav said while the Congress had ruined the country, the Bharatiya Janata Party posed a grave threat by dividing the people on communal lines.

Mr. Naidu said both the BJP

and the Congress were the biggest enemies to Assam's development. The AGP might have just two MPs in Parliament but the party was not alone. "They will be backed by 80 MPs of the TDP and the Samajwadi Party in Parliament in forcefully raising the burning issues of Assam."

"Migrant laws for mileage"

The TDP leader accused the Congress of "blackmailing the minorities" in the name of protecting them and coming out with new migrant laws only to gain political mileage.

Samajwadi Party general secretary Amar Singh, who spoke in fluent Bengali, said all MPs of his party and the TDP would join the two AGP members in asking the Centre: "Assam has given enough to Delhi. What has Delhi given back to Assam?"

Mr. Goswami said the Assam election would lead to the formation of a non-Congress, non-BJP front of regional, democratic and Left parties. It was the only viable alternative in the present political scenario.

The AGP chief said though the AGP's tie-up was limited to seat adjustments with the Left and other democratic parties, in the post-poll scenario these parties would give shape to this understanding based on a political consensus and draw up common programmes.

07 APR 2006

THE HINDU

PM has it right

Ufa caught on the backfoot

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's ruling out dialogue on Ufa's demand for sovereignty at Guwahati last week comes as a surprise because it was only after the PMC agreed to discuss this core issue did Ufa leaders appoint an 11-member People's Consultative Group in September to prepare modalities for talks. The Centre had consistently rejected the demand but last year the PMO sent an e-mail to Ufa chief, Arabinda Rajkhowa, through facilitator and Assamese literateur Mamoni Goswami, accepting it, so much so that he could not believe it and wanted to see the original message. If the Prime Minister's word is final he should know better since it is the PMO which is holding talks with Ufa bypassing the Union home ministry. It must, however, be admitted that after the PCG's last round of talks in February there has been less violence involving Ufa, suggesting some serious thinking on its part. On the other hand, the Centre also promised to consider releasing some relatives of Ufa cadres.

There are strong reservations about talking to Ufa which is not only unwilling to give up its formal commitment to sovereignty, but also questions India's status and its electoral process. But since both sides acknowledge that negotiation alone can resolve the "conflict", they must each display a conciliatory approach. Coming as it does even before a ceasefire is formalised, the Prime Minister's remark may set the clock back on the ongoing peace process. Everyone has the right to self-determination and self-reliance but Ufa must, of necessity, realise the ground realities. Most people in Assam believe "swadhin Asom" is a mere pipedream being parroted merely to keep Ufa morale afloat.

65 per cent turnout in Assam

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, April 3. — Over 65 per cent voters exercised their franchise in the first phase of the Assam Assembly election held in 65 Assembly constituencies spread over 14 districts of the state today.

The polling, which started at 7 a.m., passed off peacefully throughout the state under the watchful eyes of poll observers. 359 additional companies of paramilitary force personnel had been deployed. Out of these 285 companies were engaged in poll station duty. Election Commission (EC) official Mr RC Jain informed that the polling percentage is likely to go up as final reports from polling booths located in remote areas were still pouring in. Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were used in all the 9,723 polling stations, out of which 1,797 polling stations had been identified as very sensitive and 3,227 as sensitive.

Over 92,07, 504 lakh voters were expected to cast their votes to elect their representatives to the 12th Assam Assembly from 65 constituencies in

the first phase polling. The remaining 61 constituencies will go for polls on 10 April. Rains, coming after a long dry spell in the state, played spoilsport in the early hours of polling in some areas, including Guwahati and Dibrugarh cities. However, polling picked up towards the afternoon. Heavy polling in the range of 65 to 70 per cent were recorded in the Ulfa strong hold in Upper Assam's Sadiya, Doomdooma and Digboi constituencies. Polling was over 70 per cent in northern Assam constituencies of Jonai and Dhemaji as well as in Majuli, the biggest river island on the globe located in the bosom of the mighty Brahmaputra river. However, low polling was recorded in certain minority-dominated areas in Barak Valley and Central Assam. The voters were asked to produce any of the 23 documents prescribed by the Election Commission to identify themselves.

Chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi and his wife Mr. Dolly Gogoi cast their votes in the DCB College polling booth in his home town at Jorhat in Upper Assam at 9 a.m.

04 APR 2006

THE STATESMAN

No leniency on illegal migration in Assam, says Manmohan

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But in the name of detection of foreigners, genuine citizens will not be harassed

Special Correspondent

GUWAHATI: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Saturday said his Government would take a tough stance on infiltration in Assam.

"I want to assure the people of Assam that we will show no mercy on illegal infiltration. At the same time, all genuine citizens have my assurance that in the name of detection of foreigners they will not be harassed."

Dr. Singh, who arrived here on a two-day election campaign, told a press conference that it was the Government's duty to ensure that the Supreme Court's quashing of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act 1983 did not cause harassment to genuine citizens in the detection process.

Border fencing was being strengthened and preparation of the National Register of Citizens was progressing according to schedule.

No talks with ULFA on "sovereignty"

The process initiated by the United Progressive Alliance Government to restore peace in Assam would be expedited, he said but ruled out talks with the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) on the "sovereignty" issue.

Negotiations would be held within the constitutional framework. "The ULFA may raise the issue during talks but that does not mean all issues are open to negotiation," he said. "Doors will be open to all those who shun violence. Two rounds of talks have been held with certain groups [the discussion with the ULFA-formed People's Consultative Group] and we will accelerate the peace process."

Urging youth to shun vio-



IN POLL MOOD: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with the former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Digvijay Singh, at a press conference at the Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi Airport in Guwahati on Saturday. - PHOTO: PTI

lence, Dr. Singh said the young people of Assam did not have to take recourse to the gun to get their demands heard as the Prime Minister represented their State and the UPA Government was committed to its development. "We want to create an atmosphere of peace and reach a final solution to this intricate problem of bringing

misguided youth to the mainstream."

The Prime Minister ruled out the possibility of a mid-term poll in the country and said the UPA Government would complete its full term. "During the last two years in office, it has chalked out a programme to give a new thrust to development and it is very much on course to com-

plete its programmes in the next three years."

Asked about the persistent demand for integration of all Naga-inhabited areas made by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah), which is now engaged in peace talks with the Centre, Dr. Singh said the territorial integrity of any State in the northeast would not

be disturbed without its consent. "The territorial integrity of the northeastern States will not be disturbed unless there is a consensus among them. We are committed to protecting the territorial integrity of all States."

Appeal to voters: Page 8

THE HINDU

03 APR 2006

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2006

Interesting contest

Of the five States holding Assembly elections, Assam is perhaps the most volatile. It faces complex challenges ranging from an insurgency and the demands of multiple ethnic groups to illegal immigration from Bangladesh. But with the Congress Government of Tarun Gogoi managing a fairly smooth five-year-term — its position was consolidated by the party winning the State in the 2004 general election and also forming the government at the Centre — the run-up to the first phase of the Assembly election of April 3 (the second and final phase is on April 10) has been relatively quiet. The Asom Gana Parishad considers itself the main challenger. The regional party is eager to regain the pre-eminent political position the separatist movement enjoyed during its days of innocence. During the 1980s, the All Assam Students' Union spearheaded a popular agitation that transformed the political landscape of the State but the party that emerged from this movement squandered two terms in power following an accord with the Centre. Since the 1998 general election, it has fared poorly, with its leadership becoming a synonym for fractious and bad governance. An alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party for the 2001 Assembly election did not help much. Fighting on its own strength in 2004, the AGP retrieved some ground but, as in 1999, came third behind the Congress and the BJP in vote share. Now, with the departure of the discredited Prafulla Mahanta, it hopes to do better. But that could yet prove double-edged, because the former Chief Minister took a chunk of the party with him to form his own AGP (Progressive). For its part, the BJP is looking to improve its vote share and stay ahead of the AGP.

The main election issues remain the United Liberation Front of Asom insurgency and the influx of Bangladeshis into the State. The ruling party's claim of taming the insurgency with a peace process is untested after two rounds of talks. The banned group has continued to carry out minor attacks but there seems to be no real threat to the conduct of the Assembly election. The Congress remains somewhat nervous about the fallout from last year's Supreme Court judgment striking down the 1983 Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act. Assam's Muslims fear that the Foreigners Act, which has replaced the IMDT in the State, may be used to harass them. The Assam United Democratic Front, a new party claiming to represent the State's 28 per cent Muslim population, has the Congress worried despite the Centre's recent amendment of the Foreigners Act to assuage minority concerns. In their campaign, the AGP and the BJP have highlighted the amendment to project the message that the ruling party is not serious about preventing illegal immigration. Overall, the Congress would appear to have the political advantage in Assam but the high voltage issues make this an interesting and real contest.

9 1 APR 2006

Assam elections

Long odds, anyone?

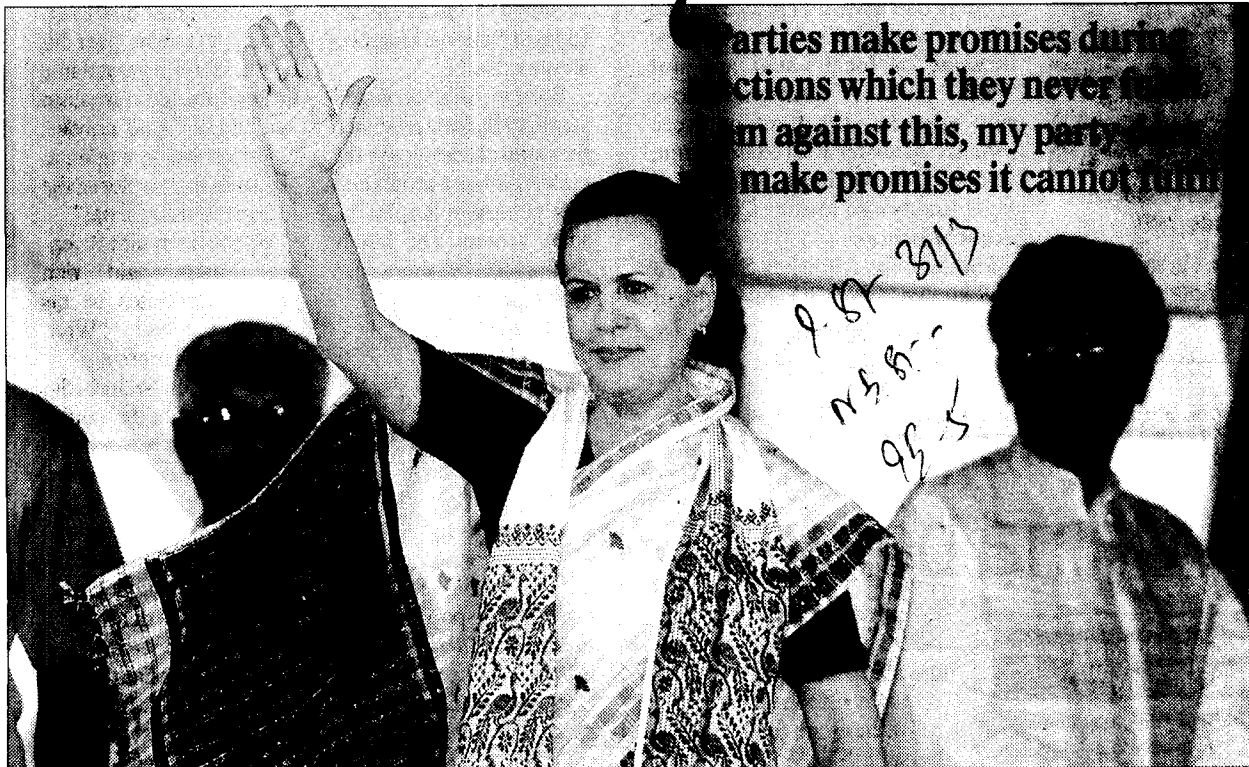
The political landscape in Assam since the 2001 assembly elections has undergone drastic changes, as a result of which all parties in the April fray enjoy long odds. Besides, the past few weeks have thrown up many firsts: for instance, the largest regional Asom Gana Parishad, which fought and won the 1986 and 2001 assembly elections as a single unit, has split again with the breakaway AGP (Progressive) headed by former chief minister Prafulla Mahanta. Regionalism being intrinsic to the AGP identity, the party presided over by Brindabon Goswami has opted for seat-sharing with the CPI and CPI(M) but Mahanta's party, with its aeroplane symbol is going it alone. Unlike in all previous elections, the Congress can no longer depend on its traditional Muslim vote bank with its main supporter, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, having formed its own Assam United Democratic Front to contest 36 seats. It poses a serious threat to the Congress and is bound to call the shots after the elections. Although the ruling party has tried to pacify the religious minority by giving a ticket to Abul Muhid Mazumdar, the architect of the now repealed Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act 1983, to contest the Hailakandi (Barak Valley) seat, Muslim wrath is unlikely to subside over the party's inability to defend the Act. The Congress appears to be losing the tea tribe votes as well, with the BJP reportedly making inroads into its stronghold. Hundreds of thousands of Koch Rajbongshis who had supported the Congress are now undecided and angry over the party's failure to include them in the listed classes. Then there is the Election Commission which, having succeeded in conducting the Bihar elections in a free and democratic manner, is out to see there are no flaws in the Assam exercise as well.

When the results are out people may not hear phrases like "overwhelming mandate" or "crushing defeat". Instead it will be about which party pushed the other into second or third place. The Congress may not get the largest share of Muslim votes but all is still not lost; political punters will still stake their money on the party. A Congress win would break the jinx of no single party ruling the state for a second consecutive term. Failure would allow history to repeat itself.

01 APR 2008

THE STATESMAN

Sonia seeks 5 more years to 'undo AGP wrongs'



Parties make promises during elections which they never fulfil. I am against this, my party does not make promises it cannot fulfil.

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP
TINSUKIA, MARCH 30

CONGRESS chief Sonia Gandhi today made several promises, saying the Congress would work more seriously in the coming five years, for the people of Assam.

Addressing a meeting in this industrial hub of Upper Assam, Sonia also claimed that the Congress government had, in the past five years, corrected all the wrongs perpetrated by the previous AGP regime.

"There is, however, a lot to be done, especially to resolve the various problems faced by the tea industry and the tea plantation labourers," she said, focusing on the large number of tea labourers who constitute the bulk of the voters in the 12 Assembly constituencies in the twin industrial districts of Tinsukia and Dibrugarh.

AGP's star trek in Tinsukia

TINSUKIA: Tinsukia has had its share of star campaigners. TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu got two Jayas—Jagapada and Jaya Bachchan—to appeal to the people to vote for the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP). Naidu, campaigner for the AGP, said it was only the AGP that could provide a progressive and stable government in Assam. "The days of the Congress are over. Assam needs overall development which only AGP can provide," he said. Jaya Bachchan, on her part, spoke in Bengali and also read out an appeal sent to the people of Assam by Anupam Bachchan to root out the Congress and install an AGP government in the state.



In Parliament

The Congress president also recalled Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to the flood and landslide-hit areas of Upper Assam in his January visit and referred to the assurances that he had made to solve the problems of the people.

Sonia's 15-minute speech also included a reference to the Kakopathar police firing of last month which left nine people dead. "I was extremely pained at the incident. Our government has provided all kind of support to the affected families," she said.

Parties vie to woo tea workers in Assam

Hunger-stricken workers are in no mood to be taken in by their promises

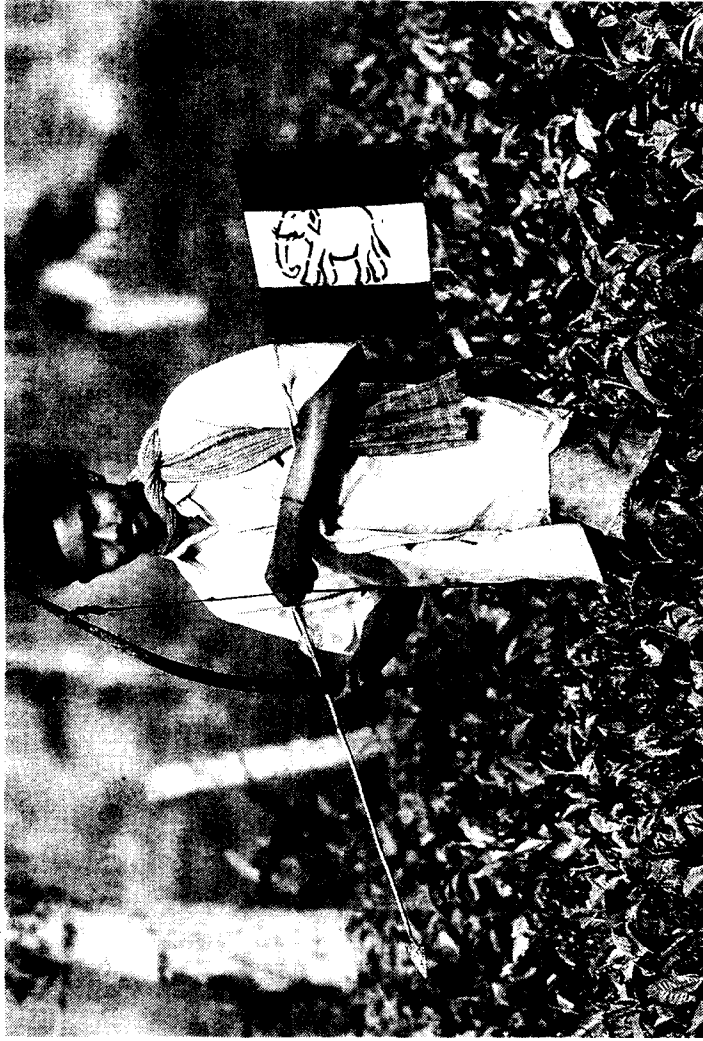
Special Correspondent

GOLAGHAT: Seven year-old Rimi Nagbongshi of Usha tea estate under the Golaghat Assembly constituency has had nothing to eat at home after returning from school for the past six months. Her family had to skip meals for days together as her mother who works in the tea estate as a permanent and her father as a temporary worker have had no money to feed Rimi and her three brothers after a lockout was declared in the garden in October last year.

Political parties and candidates have launched a vigorous election campaign in more than 800 odd tea gardens of the State. The tea tribe community plays a deciding role in 35 seats of the 126-member Assam Assembly. For the Congress, the community is a traditional vote bank while for the opposition Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) the election has come as an opportunity to make inroads among the garden workers.

However, the condition of a large population of the community whose forefathers were brought by the British to Assam is best measured described by the plight of workers of the Usha tea estate. The garden reopened recently after a new owner took over. However, the garden workers will not get the salaries of the six months of the lockout period.

Candidates of the AGP, the BJP as well as the Left parties — CPI(M) and CPI — have been harping on the poor socio-eco-



ON THE GUARD: An Asom Gana Parishad worker patrolling a tea garden to prevent distribution of any assistance before the Assembly elections that begin on April 3.

— PHOTO: RITU RAJ KONWAR

nomic condition of the tea tribe community. The Congress which has fielded as many as 16 candidates from the community has been making all out efforts to keep its fortress by trying to drive home the point that whatever development has taken place in the tea garden areas, the party must get credit for it.

Its leaders say the slump in the tea industry is due to the wrong policies pursued by the

BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government. The ruling party has been trying to woo the voters with the promise that their woes would come to an end once the revival package for the tea industry announced by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government is implemented.

Paban Singh Ghatowar, former PCC president and at present chairman of the

INTUC-controlled Asom Chah Mazdoor Sangh (ACMS), admitted that resentment against the Congress has surfaced among a section of the community. But he felt it would not have the potential to create a "major upset" in its traditional stronghold.

The Assam Tea Tribe Students Association (ATTSA) has decided to back only those candidates who would do something for the community. "We have

asked the political parties not to make any attempt to exploit the sentiment of the tea tribe community by merely including in their manifesto the assurance of granting it the scheduled tribe status. They should tell the voters in specific terms as to what the welfare measures they would take for the community," said Mr. Prahlad Gowala, ATTSA president.

The All Adivasi Students' Association of Assam (AASAA) on the other hand has vowed not to allow any political party or candidate to lure the downtrodden garden workers through distribution of mosquito nets, blankets or liquor the night before the polling day. The ATTSA too has clamped a ban on the entry of political parties in the garden areas after 6 p.m.

The AASAA claims that around 1,000 people die in the tea garden areas every year due to a lack of proper medical facilities.

Though Assam accounts for 55 per cent of country's tea production and tea garden workers made up 95 per cent of the workforce of the industry that is spread over 2.31 lakh hectares of land, only 30 per cent of the workers' homes has electricity. Only 30 per cent of the is literate.

"The British brought our forefathers here. The British left the country. However, our condition has not improved even after 58 years of independence. Will this election make any difference?" asked the hunger-stricken workers of the Usha tea estate.

Assam's poll battle

Bijay Sankar Bora

It is unusual but true that there is hardly any poll fever prevailing in Assam where voting for the 12th Assembly election is to be held on 3 and 10 April. The people have by and large remained indifferent to the electioneering by political parties while the banned United Liberation Front of Assam has once again termed the exercise as nothing but a "farce that has been of no use to the people of Assam." The outfit however has stopped short of calling for a poll boycott this time.

The people have remained cold to the electioneering as the major parties are basically harping on old issues of insurgency, infiltration from Bangladesh and underdevelopment – burning problems in Assam for decades, thanks to successive governments by Congress and Asom Gana Parishad failing to keep their promises. The latter had entered the political scene of the state on the basis of its tirade against infiltration from Bangladesh.

The ruling Congress and its arch rival AGP have pitched their electioneering on the main plank of insurgency while the BJP has focused more on infiltration. It is surprising that the AGP is not as vociferous as expected on the issue of infiltration while the Congress seems to talk about commitment to solve the problem without taking the name of Bangladesh. "The party is against infiltration from any country," the Congress poll manifesto declares and promises to find a solution to the problem within the ambit of Asom Accord of 1985.

The AGP too has adopted a similar stand on the illegal migrants issue and promises to tackle it in the light of the Asom Accord. Both the parties seem to be taking a cautious line on the issue to avoid creation of apprehension in the minds of minority voters.

The BJP, however, is talking straight on the issue. It is on the top of the party's election manifesto. Former BJP president Venkaiah Naidu announced that the party

viewed infiltration from Bangladesh as a threat to the existence of Asom. "If illegal migration from Bangladesh continues unabated, another Islamic state will be created out of Asom. The Congress has failed to fathom the gravity of the problem of illegal migration in order to retain its vote bank among Bangladeshi migrants. Over two crore Bangladeshis have swarmed into the country," Mr Naidu said.

The BJP has vowed to oppose the Congress bid to incorporate provisions of the scrapped IMDT Act, 1983, in the Foreigners Act to protect interests of illegal migrants. In this regard Mr Naidu cited the

solving insurgency through use of force. We consider insurgency a political problem, not one of law and order. The AGP will strive to establish a state of trust in Asom where killings and violence have created mistrust among different communities and sections of society. We are for autonomy to ethnic groups and demand setting up of an Upper House in the state to give adequate representation to them," the AGP chief said.

It may be mentioned that the demand for withdrawal of the AFSPA and other "black laws" is at the top of the agenda of the Ulfa-nominated negotiators of People's Consultative Group.

The Congress has flaunted its "achievement" breaking ice between the banned Ulfa and the Centre and promised to take the nascent peace negotiation with the outfit to a solution in the next five years provided it remains in power.

In respect of other militant groups including the National Democratic Front of Bodoland, Dima Halam Daogah and United People's Democratic Solidarity which are now in cease-fire with the Government of India, the

Congress has pledged to resolve the problem in a "pragmatic manner" to "usher in peace".

About insurgency, the BJP said it stood for finding a solution to the problem within the ambit of the Constitution. For the saffron party, restoration peace in Asom remains a priority, as it believes that peace is an essential prerequisite to development.

Besides these two burning issues, the political parties are trying their best to showcase their commitment to solve other burning problems like burgeoning unemployment, floods and erosion, lack of infrastructure, shortcomings in education and health sectors. These problems have remained* in the state since Independence. Obviously, voters are taking the promises to solve them with a pinch of salt.

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

Open Forum



Digvijay Singh, Tarun Gogoi and Bhubaneswar Kalita at the release of their manifesto for the forthcoming elections in Guwahati. — Eastern Projections

instance of Foreigners (Tribunals for Asom) Order, 2006, formulated by the Congress-led UPA government.

The AGP has taken a firmer posture vis-à-vis insurgency. The party has vowed to fight for the withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Power Act from the state if voted to power.

Releasing the party's election manifesto in five languages – Assamese, Hindi, English, Bengali and Bodo – here on Thursday, AGP president Brindabon Goswami said the party was opposed to prolonged deployment of the Army for internal security duty in the state and would launch a fight for withdrawal of all "black laws" now enforced in the state.

He further said the party would mount pressure on the Central government to take the nascent negotiation process with the banned Ulfa to a permanent and honourable solution to the insurgency problem.

"The AGP has no confidence in

MANIFESTO | Slams Cong on employment, foreigners' tribunal order, demands repeal of AFSPA AGP sets priorities: HRD, Bangla influx

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP
GUWAHATI, MARCH 23

TWO decades since it came into existence, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) has for a change relegated the issue of Bangladeshi influx to Number Two in its list of Assam's "burning problems" with over-all human development, including the growing unemployment, being identified as the most important problem of the state.

The regional party's election manifesto, which was released by president Brindaban Goswami here today, however, linked up the two issues by saying that growing unemployment and economic backwardness of the state was a direct fall-out of infiltration from Bangladesh, and reiterated that total implementation of the Assam Accord alone could settle the vexed issue of influx.

The AGP also hit out at the Congress party for having amended provisions of the Foreigners' Tribunal Order of 1964 and the amendments to certain provisions of the Citizenship Act in 1986 and 2004 and described these as conspiracies to further complicate the influx issue.

The regional party's manifesto also



AGP president Brindaban Goswami, flanked by senior leader Dilip Saikia (left) and MP Arun Sharma, releases the AGP manifesto in Guwahati on Thursday. Subhamoy Bhattacharjee

came down heavily on the Congress and BJP for having done precious little for solving the unemployment problem of Assam, and held the two parties responsible for failing to attract investors to the state.

On the insurgency front, the AGP described it as a political issue and called for a political solution. "There are certain political, economic and social reasons behind the rise of insurgency in the state. These require to be seriously and sincerely analysed

in order to find a lasting solution," the AGP manifesto said.

The party also called for an end to the use of the Army for counter-insurgency operations and demanded repeal of the controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958.

Goswami to contest from two seats

GUWAHATI: the AGP on Thursday announced that its president Brindaban Goswami would contest from two constituencies — Tezpur and Borsola — and file his nomination papers on Friday. Goswami (59), projected as the next Chief Minister of the state, had on Wednesday threatened not to contest as some senior AGP leaders had filed nomination papers as Independent candidates after being denied party tickets.

"The party has dismissed Goswami's plea and asked him to file nomination papers for both Tezpur and Borsola. While Goswami was elected to the state Assembly from Tezpur on three occasions, the party has decided to field him at Borsola too in view of a likely tough fight with Bijit Saikia of the Congress on home turf."

The manifesto also talked about improving various human development indicators including life expectancy, literacy, per capita income and consumption of fertiliser, issues which had on earlier occasions hardly found any importance.

Infiltration high on BJP manifesto

58-9 2207
9.15.06

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, March 22. — Former BJP president, Mr Venkaiah Naidu today pledged that the party would ensure a permanent solution to the alarming problem of Bangladeshi infiltration to Assam if the party was voted to power in the forthcoming Assembly polls.

“The BJP will follow the 3D system —detect, delete and deport—in purging Assam of illegal migrants which have posed a grave threat to

the security of not only Assam but to the entire country. Over two crore Bangladeshis have swarmed the country and the Congress government in Centre is out to protect them for the sake of the vote bank,” Mr Naidu said here.

The BJP leader who is campaigning for the party in Assam, fired a broadside at the Congress-led UPA government at the Centre for formulating the Foreigners (Tribunals of Asom) Order, 2006 in the Foreigners’ Act to replace the scrapped

IMDT Act, 1983 with an eye to protect ‘vote bank’ among illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. He criticised the Congress for trying to incorporate certain provisions of the scrapped IMDT Act in the Foreigners Act to protect illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in Assam even after the Supreme Court had held that “there can be no manner of doubt that the state of Assam is facing external aggression and internal disturbance on account of large-scale illegal migration of

Bangladeshi nationals.”

“Remember hundreds who had laid down their lives in participating in the All Asom Students Union (AASU) led anti-foreigners movement and vote to keep Congress out of power and allow the BJP to run the show for the next five year,” he said. Mr Naidu claimed that a silent wave was gaining ground in the state against the Congress’ policy of appeasement of illegal migrants and there would be surprising results in Assam elections.

23 MAR 2006

THE STATESMAN

মণিপুরে বন্ধ-বিরোধী প্রতিবাদে মহিলারা

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, আগরতলা, ২
মার্চ: ফের জঙ্গিদের বিরুদ্ধে পথে
নামলেন মণিপুরের মায়েরা। এ বার
জঙ্গিদের সমর্থক সংগঠনগুলোর ডাকা
ক্রমাগত বন্ধের বিরুদ্ধে। বিভিন্ন
জায়গায় জঙ্গি-আস্তানা ভেঙেও দিয়ে
আসছেন তাঁরা। মায়েরদের রণচণ্ডী মূর্তি
দেখে একটি জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠী আগেভাগেই
ঘোষণা করে দিয়েছে - 'বন্ধ নিষিদ্ধ'।
খৌবল মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ওকরাম ইবোবি
সিংহের নিজের জেলা। সেখানে জেলা
পুলিশের কমান্ডো বাহিনীর প্রধান খুন
ও পুলিশের পাল্টা গুলিতে এক জঙ্গি
নিহত হয়। জঙ্গির বাঙ্কবীকে
জিজ্ঞাসাবাদের জন্য আটক করে
পুলিশ। পুলিশ হেফাজতে ওই মহিলার
উপর অত্যাচারের প্রতিবাদে কয়েকটি
মহিলা সংগঠন মঙ্গলবার রাজ্যে ২৪
ঘণ্টা বন্ধের ডাকে। এর পরে ইফলের
পওনা বাজারে পুলিশের গুলিতে এক
যুবক নিহত হয়। বহু মানুষের
উপস্থিতিতে তার কাছ থেকে পিস্তল-
কার্তুজ পুলিশ উদ্ধার করে। তবুও যুবক
খুনের প্রতিবাদে ডাকা হয় বন্ধ।
বন্ধ চলাকালীন সরকারি দফতর
ও বিভিন্ন গাড়িতে আগুন লাগানো,
মন্ত্রীদের কুশপুতুল জ্বালানোর মতো
ঘটনা ঘটে যায় মণিপুরে। এ সব অবশ্য
মণিপুরের চেনা ছবি।
এর পরে পওনাবাজারের ঘটনায়
অনির্দিষ্টকাল বন্ধ ঘোষণা করে

'জয়েন্ট অ্যাকশন কমিটি' (জাক)।
কিন্তু মঙ্গলবার ইফলের বিভিন্ন 'ইমা
কেইঠেল' বা মহিলা বাজারের মায়েরা
দলে দলে রাস্তায় নেমে বন্ধ-বিরোধী
স্লোগান দিতে শুরু করেন।
এই খবর ছড়িয়ে পড়ায় বন্ধ
দোকানের ঝাঁপ খোলে। বিমানবন্দর-
সহ বেশ কয়েকটি স্থানে বন্ধ
সমর্থকদের বিক্ষোভ ব্যর্থ হয়।
সেকাট এলাকায় শতিনেক মহিলা
এর প্রতিবাদে মিছিল করেন। যোগ
দেন আরও অনেকে। এক প্রত্যক্ষদর্শীর
মতে, সংখ্যাটা কিছুক্ষণের মধ্যেই তিন
হাজার ছাড়িয়ে যায়। মিছিল গিয়ে
পৌঁছয় পিডনু পাহাড়ের নীচে জঙ্গিদের
গোপন আস্তানায়। ক্ষিপ্ত মহিলারা
সেখানে আগুন লাগিয়ে দেন।
সেকাটের গ্রাম পঞ্চায়েত প্রধান
খমডনবি স্থানীয় সংবাদমাধ্যমকে
জানান, দু'দিন আগেই মহিলারা এই
অভিযানের প্রস্তুতি নেন।
এর পরেই প্রস্তাবিত বন্ধ
প্রত্যাহার করে 'জাক'। এ ব্যাপারে
ইফল থেকে 'মেইরা পাইবি'র প্রবীণ
সদস্যা চম্রকলা দেবী বলেন, "এই
গুন্ডাগুলো আমাদের জীবন নিয়ে
ছিনিমিনি খেলে। এদের উৎপাত আর
সহ্য করব না।" আরও এক জঙ্গিদল
কেওয়াইকেএল গত কালই মাধ্যমিক
পরীক্ষার জন্য বাকিদেরও বন্ধ না
ডাকার ছমকি দিয়েছে।

ANADARZAR DAIKKA

Ahoms oppose move to rename Assam

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP
GUWAHATI, MARCH 1

ASSAM Chief minister Tarun Gogoi's decision on Monday to change the name of the state to 'Asom' has met with opposition from several leaders of the Ahom community to which the chief minister himself belongs.

While the Asam Sahitya Sabha has welcomed the move—with its president Kanaksen Deka saying that the word 'Assam' bore a British colonial legacy which it was better to be rid of—several leading scholars of the Ahom community say that there is no justification in the state government claim that it was the British who coined the word 'Assam' in 1862.

Leading the opposition is Jogendra Nath Phukan, a reputed historian and president of the Tai-Ahom Jatiya Parishad. 'Assam', he says, existed as one of the names of the province in historical documents as far back as 1662, when the Ahoms thwarted Mughal attack.

"It is strange that the government took such a hasty decision just because a former president of the Asam Sahitya Sabha had suggested it," said Phukan, who is also a former head of the department of history at Gauhati University.

He and other Ahom scholars fear the change of name would hurt the sentiments of the different ethnic groups living in the state and that it was another attempt at establishing Assamese hegemony.

The Ahoms are one of the

Gogoi refutes BJP charge of 'easing Bangladeshi inflow'

GUWAHATI: The war of words between BJP leader Pramod Mahajan and Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi took a new turn on Wednesday, with the latter stating that he would quit politics if the Opposition allegation that Bangladeshi infiltration rose during his period in office was proved true.

In a strong reaction to the BJP 'chargesheet' recently released by Mahajan, Gogoi said: "I will quit politics if the allegation that infiltration was on the rise since my government took over in 2001 is proved true... Otherwise Mahajan should reciprocate and do the same."

Terming the chargesheet a "political gimmick", Gogoi told reporters here that the BJP was trying to "communalise" politics. "By making a distinction between Hindu refugees and Muslim infiltrators, the BJP is trying to count foreigners on the basis of religion which my party and government will not allow," the Chief Minister said.

"If the BJP is sincere, then why did they not amend the Citizenship Act to make Hindu refugees from Bangladesh Indian citizens during their regime," he said.



—PTI

several communities that constitute Assamese society. Their mother tongue is Assamese.

Another historian and president of the Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha, Manoranjan Phukan, has said that the word 'Assam' has its roots in the word 'sam' that also denoted the Tai-Ahom community.

There is even a theory that traces the Ahoms' roots to the Shan province of Myanmar and to Siam (Thailand, as it is now known) before that. The Bodos and other non-Ahom communities used to call the Ahom-ruled Upper Assam region 'Ha-Sham' meaning 'the land of those from Siam'.

Several organisations like the Tai-Ahom Jatiya Parishad, the Tai Ahom Sahitya Sabha and the Tai Ahom Students' Union have, meanwhile, threatened to declare the Upper Assam region as 'Assam' if

the government did not withdraw its decision. "It is an insult to the Ahom community. We demand the immediate revocation of the decision," Prof Phukan said.

The Bodo Sahitya Sabha, on the other hand, has welcomed the decision, but not before stating that the government should have consulted different groups. "The government should have discussed the issue with the literary organisations of the ethnic groups in order to avoid any confusion and controversy," said Brojendra Kumar Brahma, president of the Sabha. Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, however, has said the opposition doesn't bother him. "The demand has come from a former president of the Asam Sahitya Sabha. I don't see any reason for me to discuss every matter with others," he said today.

02 MAR 2006

Any Law To Protect Bangladeshi Migrants Not Acceptable

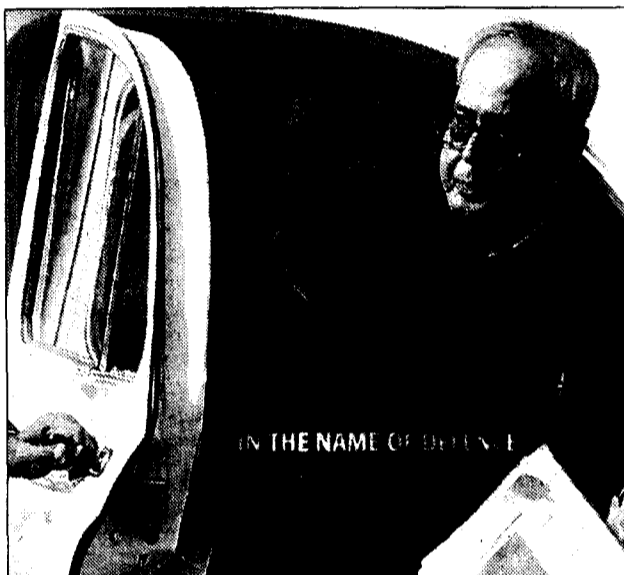
Aasu goes red on IMDT rerun, to oppose move

Bikash Singh
GUWAHATI

THE All Assam Students' Union (Aasu) on Thursday said the proposed amendment to the Foreigners (Tribunal) Order, 1964, was another mistake done on Assam. Aasu said it would oppose the amendment as it was another version of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) (IMDT) Act, 1982, that was struck down by the Supreme Court almost a year ago.

Criticising the amendment as an attempt to alienate Assam, Aasu adviser Samujjal Bhattacharya said the Cabinet Committee of Political Affairs (CCPA) cleared the amendment that was proposed by empowered group of ministers (eGoM) chaired by defence minister Pranab Mukherjee. "Mr Mukherjee has announced that the government would not try to reintroduce the IMDT Act from the backdoor. For the proposed amendment also, Mr Mukherjee did not consult any organisation," he said.

Mr Bhattacharya said Aasu would not accept any law that aims to protect migrants from Bangladesh in Assam and the Centre's attempt to push Assam out of the country. "We want a uniform Act for the whole coun-



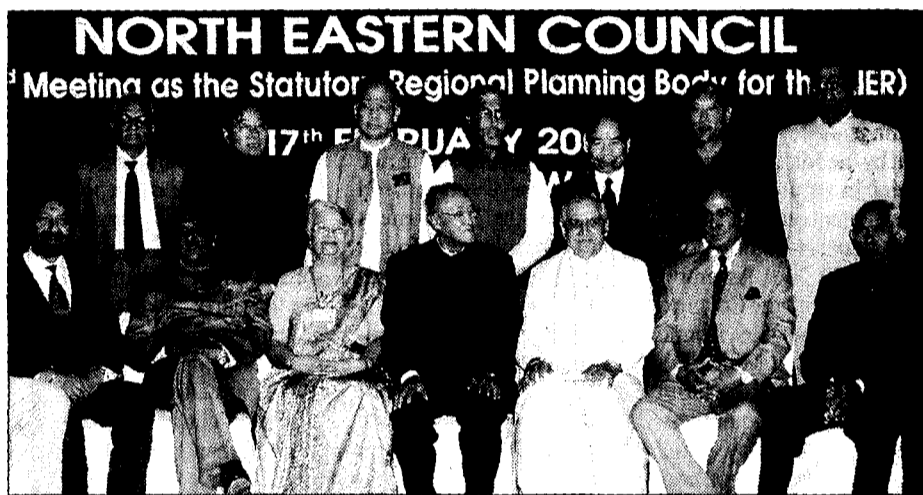
try. But now a separate Act and Order is only applicable to Assam and not elsewhere in the country. This is a very serious matter and a conspiracy to alienate the people of Assam," he said.

He questioned the timing of the amendment as the Centre was updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and accused the Centre of disrespecting the Supreme Court by bringing in a similar provision as the IMDT Act that the apex court had struck down, Aasu president Sankar

Prasad Roy said.

Aasu will have executive committee and delegates meeting on March 6 and 7 to chalk out the next course of action. Aasu, the force behind the six-year-long anti-foreigners Assam movement, also wanted to know before March 7 next how the Prime Minister would maintain the spirit of the tripartite meeting held last year where an assurance was given that all the post 1971 illegal Bangladeshis would be detected and deported.

Northeast seeks separate industrial package



Union Minister P R Kynndiah (centre-sitting) with governors and CMs of Northeast states. PTI

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 17

THE Seven Sisters and Sikkim today demanded from the Centre a special package that would make the Northeast a favoured destination of the big industries.

R K Kynndiah, Minister for Development of the Northeast, said that all the states had objected to the Centre passing on the subsidies and special incentives to other states. Summing up the day-long deliberations of the 52nd meeting of the Northeast Developmental Council, Kynndiah said, "Initially, all the special incentives for the industries were meant for this region but the Centre later passed on the same package to several other states. This time, however we want to be delinked from other states," Kynndiah said.

The council—whose members are Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Arunachal

Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Sikkim—unequivocally demanded that the Centre announce a special package to attract big business to the region. Kynndiah claimed that the Centre was already working on such a package.

The revamped Northeast Council is preparing a vision document on the development of the region that would "give a perspective of development upto year 2020". Kynndiah said the document would be ready by May.

"The eradication and control of HIV-AIDS and introduction of the information technology as a major industry there would be vital component of the document that will essentially focus on the youth," the minister said.

The Council also complained that fund allocation for the development of the north eastern states were not adequate

"In spite of our joint repre-

sentation to the Prime Minister to enhance the plan outlay of NEC during 2005-06 to Rs 1136.80 crore, the outlay continues to stagnate at Rs 461.50 crore," Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio said.

He said the budget for 2006-07 should be enhanced to at least Rs 2012 crore.

Asking the Union government to properly develop its "Look East Policy", Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga said the policy should be based on a 15 year perspective plan. Meghalaya Chief Minister D D Lapang said central allocation for the NEC should be enhanced along with improvement in airport infrastructure and air connectivity.

Observing that infrastructure development of the north east required sufficient funds, Manipur Governor S S Sidhu appealed to the Union Finance Ministry to support development projects of the region adequately.

Arunachal Pradesh CM Gegong Apang hoped that the NEC would be able to find corrective measures to solve the problems related to the socio-economic development. Manipur Chief Minister O Ibobi Singh urged the Centre to take care of ground realities of the region before framing policy.

—with PTI

18/02/2006
NEW DELHI

The uniform again

5/16 Custodial death belittles Assam force

That the death of an alleged Ulfa informer, Ajit Mahanta, assumedly while in Army custody, should trigger vehement public protests was only to be expected. Five persons were killed in police firing and Ulfa exploited local sentiments by slapping a 12-hour bandh. Had the victim been a militant, few would have taken notice. While the Army claims Mahanta was an informer, fellow villagers assert he was innocent. Whether or not this was a case of mistaken identity is not the moot point, what is questionable is his death in custody. The killing of a suspected militant, 32-year-old Manorama Devi, two years ago in Imphal — she was arrested by Assam Rifles personnel and was allegedly physically abused before being shot dead (according to the army while trying to flee) — forced some women to stage a nude protest and demand withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. To stem continuing protests the Centre appointed a committee to review the Act, and it has already submitted its report. In 1998 the Supreme Court upheld the Act but drastically cut the army's indiscriminate use of its provisions, particularly those relating to harassment of civilians during search operations, and brought it under the provisions of the CrPC. The Army has tried to mollify widespread public anger by apologising for the "unfortunate" death and paying compensation to Mahanta's family, but those responsible for the deed should not go unpunished. It is reasonable to assume that after this incident Delhi will act fast on the review committee's recommendations.

Only last month some BSF personnel behaved in a manner unbecoming of the uniform by beating priests and devotees at Guwahati's Kamakhya temple. They were in civvies and reportedly refused to stand in the queue, and when the public protested they withdrew only to return in uniform and armed. Such show of power, arrogance and indiscipline deserves strong condemnation. Since the Army and paramilitary forces' involvement in counter-insurgency and internal security cannot be avoided, they must respect local sentiments to win people's confidence.

17 JUL 2006

THE STATESMAN

Violence mars State bandh called by AASU

Bandh to protest against killing of 9 persons in police firing at Kakopathar

Sushanta Talukdar

GUWAHATI: Violence marred the 12-hour Assam Bandh called by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) on Tuesday. Supporters of the bandh set fire to several vehicles, assaulted a senior railway official and pelted stones on public and private vehicles in the city and other parts of the State.

For the first time, since the days of the Assam agitation, the bandh evoked total response in the three districts of Barak valley. The bandh was called to protest the killing of nine persons in police firing at Kakopathar and the death of Ajit Mahanta allegedly in Army custody. The State Government on Tuesday shifted the Deputy Commissioner of Tinsukia district, Gautom Ganguli.

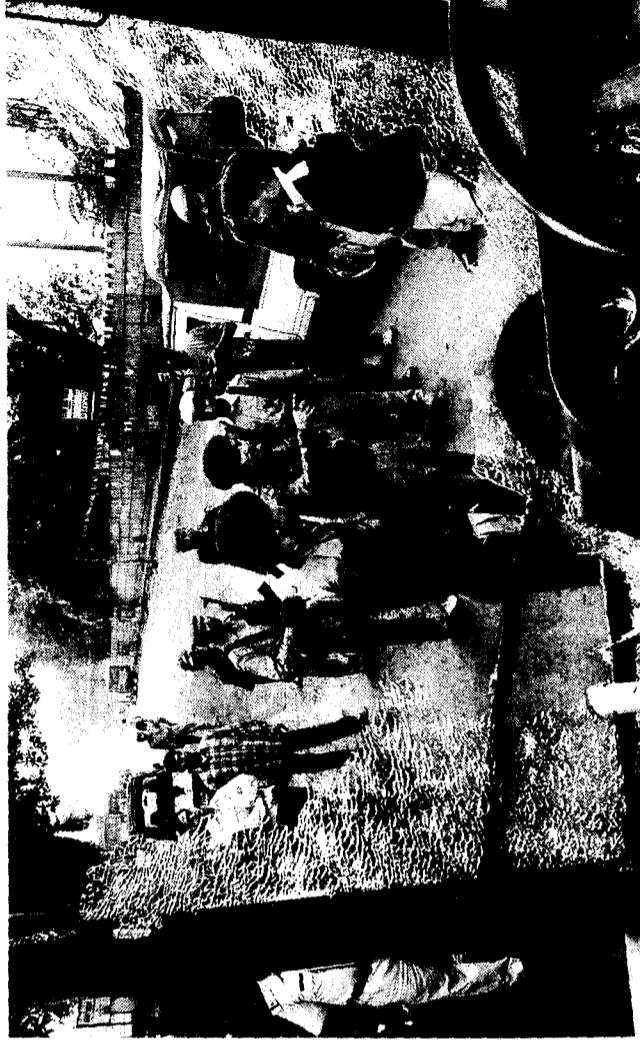
Official assaulted

Police said the Chief Commercial Manager of North East Frontier Railway, Kaushik Muk-

hopadhaya, was injured when he was assaulted at Maligaon. He is undergoing treatment at a hospital. The AASU activists also damaged four vehicles belonging to the railways. The Public Relations Officer, N. F. Railway, Jayanta Sarma, told *The Hindu* that when the AASU workers assaulted Mr. Mukhopadhaya and his driver, he tried to intervene. "But they were in no mood to listen and instead attacked my vehicle and damaged my vehicle," said Mr. Sarma who lodged an FIR at police outpost.

The bandh supporters also damaged the vehicle of Commissioner, Lower Assam Division at Panbazar. The police arrested 46 bandh supporters in the city.

Police said bandh supporters also set ablaze two vehicles and damaged a number of vehicles including buses run by the Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC) in different parts of the city. More than 400 AASU workers were arrested.



MOB FURY: Security personnel inspecting the spot where members of the All-Assam Students' Union smashed the windshield of a bus during the 12-hour Assam bandh in Guwahati on Tuesday. - PHOTO: RITU RAJ KONWAR

অগ্নিগর্ভ অসম

সম পুনরায় অগ্নিগর্ভ। সেনা হেফাজতে অর্জিত মহত্ত্ব নামক এক ব্যক্তির মৃত্যুকে কেন্দ্র করিয়া জনতা-জওয়ান সংঘর্ষ ক্রমেই বিস্ফোরক হইবার পথে। আলফা নিয়োজিত পিসিজি হুমকি দিয়াছে, অবিলম্বে সেনা অভিযান বন্ধ না হইলে তাহারা অসমে শান্তি আলোচনা হইতে সরিয়া আসিবে। অস্যাৰ্ণ, আলোচনার মাধ্যমে অসমে শান্তি ফিরাইবার সমূহ প্রক্রিয়াটির ভবিষ্যৎ আরও এক বার অনিশ্চিত হইয়া পড়িবার পরিস্থিতি দেখা দিয়াছে। সন্দেহ নাই, পিসিজি-র বকলমে হইলেও এই হুমকি প্রকৃতপক্ষে আলফা-দ্বারাই প্রদত্ত। ইতিপূর্বে একাধিক বার অসমে শান্তি আলোচনা সঙ্কটে পড়িয়াছে। আরও এক বার সেই ইতিহাসের পুনরাবৃত্তি হইলে তাহা বিস্ময়কর হইবে না সত্য, কিন্তু নিশ্চিত ভাবেই ঘটনাটি দুর্ভাগ্যজনক হইবে। পরিস্থিতির উন্নতি ঘটাইবার জন্য স্বয়ং সনিয়া গান্ধী হস্তক্ষেপ করিয়াছেন, সেনা হেফাজতে মৃত্যুর ঘটনায় কেহ দোষী প্রমাণিত হইলে 'কঠোর' শাস্তির প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়াছেন। সমস্যা হইল, জনতা এবং সেনাবাহিনীর পারস্পরিক সম্পর্ক এমনই বিষাইয়া গিয়াছে যে সনিয়ার সেই আশ্বাস অশাস্ত অসমে ঠিক কী পরিমাণ শান্তিবারি সিঞ্চন করিবে, তাহা বলা কঠিন।

সমস্যাটির শিকড়সন্ধান করিতে বসিলে, যে বিষয়টি অনিবার্য ভাবেই উঠিয়া আসিবে, তাহা প্রশাসনের অকর্মণ্যতা। শুধুমাত্র সাম্প্রতিক অসমে নহে, অনতিঅতীতে ওড়িশার কলিঙ্গনগরে, কিংবা কয়েক বৎসর পূর্বে মনিপুরে মনোরমার মৃত্যুর ঘটনায় যাহা দেখা গিয়াছিল, প্রশাসনিক অবহেলার সেই ঐতিহ্যটিই এখনও বহমান। সেনাবাহিনী ঠিক কী করিয়াছে, কী পরিমাণ অন্যায্য করিয়াছে, তাহা যথাযথ তদন্তসাপেক্ষ। প্রশ্ন হইল, জনতার সহিত আচরণে প্রশাসন যে রূপ মনোভাব প্রদর্শন করিতেছে, তাহা কোনও ভাবেই প্রশাসনিক প্রাজ্ঞতার পরিচয়বাহী নহে। বিশেষ করিয়া অসমের ন্যায় রাজ্যের ক্ষেত্রে ইহা আরও নিদারুণ ভাবে সত্য। ইহা এক্ষণে সুবিদিত যে সমগ্র উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতে বিবিধ বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদী আন্দোলনের একটি সাধারণ উৎস হইল, আন্দোলনকারীদের বক্তব্য অনুযায়ী, ভারতের তথাকথিত 'মূল' ভূখণ্ডের সহিত ওই অঞ্চলের মানসিক দূরত্ব। পুনরায় বলা চলে, এমন কোনও প্রধান-অপ্রধান-এর ভাগাভাগি বাস্তবে বিদ্যমান কি না, তাহা অন্যতর আলোচনার বিষয়— কিন্তু যে অঞ্চলে এমন একটি 'দূরত্ব'-জনিত অভিমান বা বঞ্চনাবোধ প্রবল ভাবেই ক্রিয়াশীল, বিশেষ ভাবে সেই অঞ্চলে জনতার সহিত পারস্পরিক সম্পর্ক স্থাপনের ক্ষেত্রে অধিকতর সতর্কতা গ্রহণই বাঞ্ছনীয়। অসমে তাহা দেখা যায় নাই। জনতার সহিত নিরাপত্তা বাহিনীর দফায় দফায় সংঘর্ষ, তাহাতে একাধিক প্রাণহানির ঘটনা সত্ত্বেও মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বা স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী কেহই ঘটনাস্থল পরিদর্শন করেন নাই। তর্ক উঠিবে, এই ধরনের পরিদর্শন কার্যত অনেক ক্ষেত্রেই আনুষ্ঠানিক। সশরীরে না গিয়াও দক্ষ হাতে প্রতিকূল পরিস্থিতির মোকাবিলা করা সম্ভব। খটকা হইল, এখনও পর্যন্ত সেই দক্ষতাটিও বিশেষ দেখা যায় নাই। তাহা ব্যতীত, জনগণের মনোভাব প্রশাসন-বিরোধী হইয়া উঠিলে তাহাদের আস্থাবর্ধক কিছু কার্যক্রমও করা প্রয়োজন। যথাসময়ে সেই কর্তব্যটি পালন করিলে যতটা সুফল হইবার সম্ভাবনা, কার্যটি না করিলে সমস্যা বৃদ্ধি পাইবার সম্ভাবনা তাহার বহুগুণ অধিক। অসমের প্রাজ্ঞ রাজনীতিবিদ মুখ্যমন্ত্রী তরুণ গগৈ মহাশয় ইহা জানেন না বলিলে সত্যের অপলাপ হইবে। তৎসত্ত্বেও তিনি ঘটনাস্থলে না গিয়া অসমে আগত দলনেত্রীর তত্ত্বাবধানকেই স্বীয় কর্তব্য বলিয়া স্থির করিয়াছেন। নিন্দুকে বলিতে পারে, হয়তো ইহারই ফলে প্রবল অশান্ত পরিস্থিতির ভিতরেও আইনশৃঙ্খলা রক্ষার ক্ষেত্রে 'ভাল' কাজ করিবার শংসাপত্র মিলিয়াছে। সনিয়া গান্ধী প্রদত্ত সেই শংসাবাক্যটি কার্যকালে কতটা সুফলদায়ী হইবে, তাহা লইয়া সঙ্গত কারণেই সন্দেহ বিস্তর। অসমে যে ভাবেই হউক, আলোচনার পরিবেশটি বজায় রাখা জরুরি। যে স্থলে প্রশাসনের ন্যূনতম ক্রটিকেও ফাঁপাইয়া গুরুতর আকার দিয়া শান্তি আলোচনা বানচাল করিতে একাধিক পক্ষ তৎপর, সেই পরিস্থিতিতে প্রশাসনের তরফে কিন্তু আরও দায়িত্বশীল মনোভাব কাম্য।

Army sorry, but heat on

RIPUNJOY DAS

Gohaingaon (Tinsukia), Feb. 12: After the trauma, the healing touch.

Eastern Command chief Lt Gen. Arvind Sharma today visited Kakopathar, the Assam town that exploded in mutiny against the army over a custody death just over a week ago, to hand a cheque for Rs 1 lakh and Rs 5,000 in cash to the victim's family. However, there was no stemming the tide of protests, which spread from Tinsukia district to other areas.

Residents of Demow, in Sivasagar district, blocked National Highway 37 in protest against Friday's police firing on protesters at Kakopathar. Movement of vehicles on the highway, which links Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts, was stalled for over two-and-a-half hours.

In Kakopathar, there was an uneasy calm when Lt Gen. Sharma visited the house of Ajit Mahanta, who had been picked up by the army on February 4 for allegedly working as an "Ulfalinkman". The general-officer-commanding of the Eastern Command spent about 30 minutes in the family's hut.

"This was a very unfortunate thing to happen. I am shocked. This should not have taken place. We have already constituted a court of inquiry and will get the report very soon," Lt Gen. Sharma said before handing over the cheque and the cash.

"We know we have done

wrong. We have not come here to compensate you by giving some money, we have come here to meet you purely on humanitarian grounds," he told Ajit's mother, Sabita.

The army promised another Rs 1 lakh and a rehabilitation package that includes reconstruction of the family's house, "adoption" of Ajit's two sons and a job or employment assistance to his wife.

Brig. A.K. Bardalai, commander of the Tezu-based 82 Mountain Brigade, translated each and every word of consolation uttered by the Eastern Command chief.

As Lt Gen. Sharma got up to leave, his hands folded, Sabita said: "*Aru namaribi dei...mur Ajit gol, aru nahe. Apunasabak anurodh korisu, aru namaribi...* (please do not kill anyone else, my Ajit is gone, he will not come back, I beg of you, do not kill any more)."

The general nodded and asked Brig. Bardalai to tell the family that he had lost his father when he was only nine and understood how Ajit's children must be feeling.

Lt Gen. Sharma later told **The Telegraph** that the army had been analysing the situation in the wake of the custody death and "certain corrective measures have already been taken while conducting counter-insurgency operations".

In Guwahati, chief minister Tarun Gogoi announced a judicial probe into the police firing and Rs 3 lakh each for the families of all nine victims.

Sonia pulls up army

Defends Centre's decision to amend foreigners Act

RAHUL Karmakar & DIGAMBAR Patowary
Guwahati/Barpeta, February 11

IN WHAT could impact counter-insurgency operations in Assam, UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Saturday castigated the army for the custodial death of an alleged Ulfa activist that triggered mass protests and led to the death of eight people in police firing.

She also played to the gallery at minority-heavy Barpeta by defending the Centre's decision to amend a clause of the foreigners Act to ensure constitutional safeguards to those branded aliens. Her statements on both counts were like a double-edged sword, soothing one group and angering another.

Addressing a 15,000-strong crowd at Tezpur — it marked the start of the Congress poll campaign in Assam — Gandhi virtually gave a "guilty" judgment against the army for the custodial death of Ajit Mahanta.

"I've asked defence minister Pranab Mukherjee to take stern action against those responsible for the death", she said, reminding the armed forces that their duty was not only to ensure law and order, but also to protect the citizens.

Also addressing the rally, chief minister Tarun Gogoi said he had sought court martial of the army officers and jawans involved in Mahanta's "death under suspicious circumstances". The defence minister, he added, had assured prompt action.

Moving on to Barpeta, the UPA chairperson's brief speech was devoted to the touchy migrants issue. Maintaining that the Foreigners' Act needed rephrasing, following the scrapping of the IM(DT) Act in July last year, she said, "We're committed to the protection of rights of all sections of society and want to ensure that no law leaves room for harassment of the minorities".

Apparently assuaging Muslims — disillusioned with the Congress following the IM(DT) Act 'setback', they had aligned with the minority-specific United Democratic Alliance — who hold sway in at least 35 Assembly seats in Assam, Sonia's speech expectedly unleashed a wave of anger among



Sonia Gandhi wears a traditional *japi* at an election rally in Tezpur, Guwahati, on Saturday.

PTI

the indigenous groups. The All-Assam Students' Union (Aasu), which had won the legal battle against the IM(DT) Act, was particularly furious.

Reacting to the UPA decision to "allow the IM(DT) Act in through the backdoor", Aasu president Shankar Prasad Roy vowed strong opposition to any move to dilute the foreigners Act. "The Congress is cosying up to illegal Bangladeshis with an eye on the minority

vote-bank", he said, announcing a bandh on February 14 to protest against the Kakopathar killings.

Meanwhile, the Kakopathar and Makum areas in Tinsukia district continued to be under curfew as the toll in Friday's police firing rose to eight.

The Tinsukia district authorities claimed some Ulfa activists among the protesters had started the trouble by opening fire from their automatic weapons.

ASSAM POLL CAMPAIGN

12 FEB 2006

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

FOREIGNERS' ACT PROVISIONS TO BE USED FOR SETTING UP TRIBUNALS

'Fair' play ahead of Assam polls

NEW DELHI, Feb. 10. — Stopping short of proposing a new law to restore the key provisions of the quashed IMDT Act on the question of determination of illegal migrants, the Manmohan Singh government today decided to set up tribunals under the Foreigners' Act to ensure fair hearing to a person before declaring him a foreigner in Assam.

The Congress-led UPA government's politically-significant move ahead of the Assembly elections in Assam expectedly generated political heat with the BJP and the Congress here crossing swords and trading charges on the issue.

The decision was taken by the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA), chaired by the

Prime Minister. This comes after Group of Ministers (GoM) considered the situation in the backdrop of the Supreme Court verdict of July last year striking down the controversial Assam-specific Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunals Act as "unconstitutional". The GoM, headed by Dr Manmohan Singh, was constituted after the Supreme Court judgement to take stock of the situation and work out remedial measures.

Instead of reviving the IMDT Act in another form, the GoM decided to make use of certain provisions under the Foreigners Act for setting up tribunals to determine illegal migrants.

The defence minister, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, said the CCPA decided that before a person was declared a foreigner, his case should be referred to a tribunal to

give him full opportunity to be heard. The tribunals would be set up under the Foreigners' Act, he said implying that there would be no need of making any amendment in this legislation. Under the IMDT Act, the onus of proving one's citizenship rested on the complainant rather than the accused, while it is the reverse under the Foreigners Act.

The BJP and the Assam Gano Parishad have consistently opposed the IMDT Act accusing the Congress of protecting "illegal Bangladeshi migrants" in Assam for the sake of "vote-bank politics" — a charge the Congress always denied. The BJP and the AGP have maintained that the IMDT Act had failed miserably in identifying and deporting illegal migrants to Bangladesh.

During his visit to Assam

last month, the Prime Minister, himself a Rajya Sabha member from the state, had assured the minorities that his government would take all necessary steps to protect their legitimate interests following the scrapping of the IMDT Act and that nothing would be allowed to harass genuine citizens. Protesting against the move, the BJP said the step would come as a blessing in infiltration and was taken keeping in mind the poll.

The BJP spokesman, Mr Ravi Shankar Prasad, alleged that 90-99 per cent of the infiltrators sneaking into Assam from Bangladesh were Muslims. He said there was no problem with regard to Muslims citizens of India. "We welcome them. But giving protection to infiltrators for vote-bank politics is unacceptable. We condemn it and will oppose it inside and outside the Parliament", Mr Prasad said, indicating that the party would raise the issue during its Assam poll campaign. The BJP also came out in defence of "Hindu infiltrators". Mr Prasad said Hindus entered Indian territory for fear of being persecuted and that the government should sympathetically consider their case and grant them refuge. The Congress rejected the BJP's charges of indulging in "minority appeasement" and welcomed the Centre's decision. The AICC general secretary in charge of Assam, Mr Digvijay Singh, said it was not a "minority issue", giving examples of places in Assam and Orissa, where, he noted, there were more Hindu migrants than Muslims. "The matter relates to ensuring justice and fair play to the citizens."

আত্মশাসনের কাঁটা

উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলের দুই জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠী এন এস সি এন এবং আলফার সহিত কেন্দ্রের আলোচনা ফলপ্রসূ হইয়াছে। এই আলোচনা অতিশয় জরুরি ছিল। কারণ নাগা জঙ্গি নেতারা সংঘর্ষ-বিরতির মেয়াদ ফুরাইবামাত্র সশস্ত্র সংগ্রামে ফিরিবার ছমকি দিতেছিলেন, আলফাও অশোধিত তেলের পাইপলাইনে নাশকতা বাড়াইয়া সরকারকে আলোচনায় ফিরিবার চরমপত্র দিয়াছিল। তাহাদের ছমকি যে বায়বীয় নয়, বাস্তবে সে ছমকি রূপায়িত করার ক্ষমতাও জঙ্গিদের আছে, সরকার তাহা বিলক্ষণ অবহিত ছিল। তাই শান্তি-আলোচনার প্রক্রিয়া অনাবশ্যক ঝুলাইয়া না রাখিয়া কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রকের পদস্থ আমলারা উদ্যোগী হন। তাহাতে আপাতত সূফলই মিলিয়াছে। নাগা জঙ্গিরা অবশ্য ছয় মাসের বেশি সংঘর্ষ-বিরতির মেয়াদ বাড়াইতে রাজি হয় নাই। তুলনায় আলফা নেতৃত্ব খুশি। আলফা চাহিয়াছিল, তাহার বিরুদ্ধে সামরিক বাহিনীর তৎপরতা বন্ধ হোক। এ ব্যাপারে সরকারের বক্তব্য ছিল, আলফা আগে অস্ত্র সংবরণ করুক। বৈঠকে কোন পক্ষের জেদ বহাল থাকিয়াছে, সেটা বড় কথা নয়। আসল কথা হইল, উভয় পক্ষই একটা গ্রহণযোগ্য বোঝাপড়ায় পৌঁছাইয়াছে, যাহার ফলে অসমে শান্তির সম্ভাবনা উজ্জ্বল হইয়াছে। রাজ্যে আসন্ন বিধানসভা নির্বাচনের প্রেক্ষিতে এই শান্তি জরুরি।

নাগা জঙ্গি নেতৃত্ব, বিশেষত মুইভা, তুলনায় তত সন্তুষ্ট নহেন। সরকারের বিরুদ্ধে তাঁহার অভিযোগ, কবল দফায়-দফায় সংঘর্ষ-বিরতির মেয়াদ বাড়াইয়া লইয়া সরকার সমস্যা মীমাংসায় টালবাহানা করিতেছে এবং সাত বছর হইয়া গেলেও কোনও নির্দিষ্ট সমাধান মেলে নাই। কিন্তু সে জন্য নাগা নেতৃত্ব নিজেরাই কি অংশত দায়ী নহেন? নাগালিম অর্থাৎ নাগা-অধ্যুষিত যাবতীয় অঞ্চলকে নাগা-শাসিত রাজনৈতিক এককের অন্তর্ভুক্ত করার অনমনীয় দাবিই কি মীমাংসার পথের কাঁটা হইয়া নাই? নাগা নেতারা দেখিয়াছেন, মণিপুরের নাগা-অধ্যুষিত জেলাগুলিকে চুক্তির আওতাভুক্ত করার প্রস্তাবেই মণিপুর কেমন অগ্নিগর্ভ হইয়া উঠিয়াছিল। একই ভাবে অসম, অরুণাচল প্রদেশ, মিজোরাম বা মেঘালয়ের প্রতিক্রিয়াও বিশ্লেষণ করিবে। নাগা নেতাদের আবদার মানিতে হইলে উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলের যেখানে-যেখানে নাগা জনপদ রহিয়াছে, সবকটিকেই নাগালিমের অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিতে হইবে। ইহার অর্থ অঞ্চলের প্রায় সব রাজ্যকেই জনবিন্যাসের ভিত্তিতে আবার ভাঙিতে হইবে এবং তাহাদের সীমানা পুনর্নির্ধারণ করিতে হইবে। অন্যান্য রাজ্য তাহা মানিয়া লইবে কেন? নাগা নেতৃত্বকে খুশি করিতে গিয়া কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারই বা এ ধরনের বৈষম্যমূলক দাবি শিরোধার্য করিবে কেন? কেন্দ্রের কাছে মণিপুর, অসম বা অরুণাচল প্রদেশের মানুষের আশা-আকাঙ্ক্ষা বা দাবি, নাগাল্যান্ডের মানুষের আশা-আকাঙ্ক্ষা বা দাবি অপেক্ষা কম গুরুত্বপূর্ণ হইবে কেন? স্বভাবতই মণিপুরের বাসিন্দাদের তীব্র প্রতিক্রিয়া দেখিয়া কেন্দ্র নাগা আবদার মানিতে দ্বিধাগ্রস্ত। নাগা-অধ্যুষিত জনপদগুলির আঞ্চলিক অখণ্ডতা সুনিশ্চিত করিতে গিয়া কেন্দ্র অঞ্চলের অপরাপর রাজ্যের বিভাজন অনুমোদন করিবে কোন নৈতিক অধিকারে?

নাগা নেতারা একটু অন্য ভাবেও বিষয়টি বিচার করিতে পারেন। তাঁহাদের প্রস্তাবিত 'নাগালিম'-এর মধ্যে কিংবা বর্তমান নাগাল্যান্ড রাজ্যে যে-সব এলাকায় অ-নাগাদের বসবাস, সেই জনপদগুলি কি তাঁহারা অসম, অরুণাচল প্রদেশ, মণিপুরকে ছাড়িয়া দিতে প্রস্তুত? যে যুক্তিতে তাঁহারা অন্যান্য রাজ্যের নাগা-অধ্যুষিত অঞ্চলগুলি দাবি করিতেছেন, সেই একই যুক্তিতে প্রায় সমগ্র ডিমাপুর, এমনকী রাজধানী কোহিমার বেশ কিছু এলাকাও নাগালিম-এর বাহিরে চলিয়া যাওয়া উচিত? মুইভা কি সে জন্য প্রস্তুত? তাঁহাদের জবাব অনুমান করা কঠিন নয়। ভাগ্যান্বেষণে, কার্যব্যপদেশে বিভিন্ন জনগোষ্ঠী ও সম্প্রদায়ের মানুষ নিজের ভিটা, পাড়া, গ্রাম, এমনকী রাজ্যও ছাড়িয়া অন্যত্র পাড়ি জমান, সেখানে স্থায়ী ভাবে বসবাস করেন, ক্রমে সেখানকারই মানুষ হইয়া যান। এই চলাচল, নমনীয়তা বহুত্ববাদী রাষ্ট্রের গণতান্ত্রিক জনবিন্যাস ও সংস্কৃতিকেও ঋদ্ধ করে। নাগা নেতৃত্ব সংকীর্ণ ভূগোল নির্মিত বিষয়টির নিষ্পত্তি চান। তাঁহারা যদি আর্থ-সামাজিক উন্নয়ন ও রাজনৈতিক আত্মশাসনের দাবিগুলির উপর জোর দেন, তাহা হইলে মনে হয় শান্তি-আলোচনা গতি অর্জন করিবে।

Assam uprising against army

RIPUNJOY DAS

Kakopathar (Tinsukia), Feb. 10: An Assam town exploded in mutiny to protest a death in army custody with 20,000 people marching 15 kilometres on a mission to burn down a police station.

Overwhelmed by the sight of such a multitude, police opened fire, killing at least five persons in the Upper Assam town of Kakopathar, 500 km from Guwahati. Unofficial sources pegged the toll at seven. Among the dead is a CRPF jawan.

Indefinite curfew has been clamped in the town in Tinsukia district from 7 pm and the army has moved in.

Residents of Kakopathar have been blocking National

Highway 52 since the death of Ajit Mahanta in army custody came to light early this week. They have been demanding a public trial of the army personnel linked to the death.

However, around 1 pm today, the huge column of protesters started moving towards Kakopathar police station, the police said.

The mood turned ugly after the protesters covered around 12 km. They set a police vehicle ablaze and damaged two buses.



A police vehicle on fire.

Picture by UB Photos

Police said the forces first burst tear-gas shells and then fired in the air, but the protesters pressed ahead. They were about 3 km from Kakopathar police station when some announced their intention to set the police station on fire.

The threat prompted the police to fire on the crowd. The area was cleared of protesters by around 7 pm, when the police again fired in the air.

A senior police officer said the Assam government — the

Congress regime is facing polls in the next few months — allowed the situation to drift by not taking action against the protesters when they blocked the highway for the first time on Monday. "They grew bolder by the day," he said.

On Wednesday, the army said it was working out a compensation and rehabilitation package for Ajit's family.

Termed an "active Ulfa linkman", Ajit is said to have sustained fatal internal injuries in a fall while trying to escape.

A team from the 1/3 Gorkha Rifles had ostensibly asked him to guide the squad to an Ulfa "treasure chest" of weapons and cash.

■ Picture on Page 7

Stop Army operations, says Ulfa

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 7. — Urging the Centre to release its cadres arrested in Assam, the United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) today asked the government to stop military operations in the state and to continue a peaceful dialogue. The message was conveyed by the extremist organisation through the People's

Consultative Group (PCG), which met the National Security Advisor, Mr M K Narayanan, today.

Talking to reporters, the PCG representative, Mr Arup Borbar, said: "There have been operations, there have been killings of Ulfa leaders without any provocation and these things could have been avoided. Once there is violence, it leads to counter violence."

Ulfa had appointed the 11-member PCG team headed by Assamese writer Indira Goswami to hold talks with the Centre to find a peaceful solution to the 27-year-old insurgency in the state. This is the second round of talks between the Centre and Ulfa representatives in the past year.

The PCG also appealed to New Delhi to release prisoners and small chil-

dren in the 411 age group. "They are languishing in several jails in Assam with their mothers, having committed no crime. They should be released immediately," said Ms Goswami.

The Centre has asked Ulfa to shun violence and cited incidents of violence that have mainly targeted oil pipelines and power plants in Assam recently. The Centre-Ulfa dialogue started in 1992, when the

government released five senior Ulfa leaders to initiate peace talks with the then Prime Minister, Mr PV Narashima Rao. The Ulfa leaders, however, went underground after holding one round of talks.

It was only last year, after a 13-year-old deadlock, that the Ulfa again initiated peace talks through the 11-member People's Consultative Group.

Cloud over Ulfa talks with Centre

GUWAHATI, Feb. 5. — A cloud of uncertainty hangs over a second round of talks between the Ulfa-appointed negotiators of the People's Consultative Group (PCG) and the Centre, slated for Tuesday, in view of the militant group's demand for sovereignty to end the "India-Assam" conflict.

In a statement e-mailed to the media here today, Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa iterated that the issue of sovereignty must be discussed to solve all problems dogging Assam. The Ulfa leader criticised the All Assam Students Union for saying that the state's problems could be solved by staying within the geographical boundary of India and within the framework of the Indian Constitution. The Ulfa today ridiculed the AASU's stand, accusing the latter of playing the role of a "wing of colonial Indian rulers in Assam." The Ulfa has been making a covert campaign in the state in its bid to mobilise public support

to its demand for a discussion on "Assam's sovereignty issue".

Amid confusion over the stand of the Ulfa vis-à-vis the negotiation process, the state is still looking forward to restoration of peace while talks are going to be held between Ulfa representatives and the Centre.

All the nine members of the Ulfa-constituted PCG are leaving for New Delhi tomorrow to participate in a second round of talks, although the PMO has invited only four members. The PMO wants Lachit Bordoloi, Haidar Hussain, Ajit Bhuyan and Brajen Gogoi to attend the talks, leaving out the remaining five members of the group. The entire group has, however, decided to board the flight to New Delhi. Calling upon the PCG members to stick together, the Ulfa has rejected any offer of a "secret talk", a possibility arising out of the Centre's invitation to only four members.

— SNS

16 FEB 2008

THE STATESMAN

Where does the road lead?



Naga women wearing traditional dresses of their tribes participate in a peace rally in New Delhi. — PTI

Welcome, ceasefire extension

By Monalisa Chankija

The joint statement issued by the Government of India representatives in the recent round of talks and NSCN (I-M) leader, Th Muivah, wherein they admitted that "there has been insufficient progress in the talks" and their decision to "carry political negotiations expeditiously forward taking new initiatives" has shown that both parties are sincere in bringing about an amicable settlement.

Most people, yearning for peace for more than five decades, might be exasperated that no acceptable solution has been arrived at since the ceasefire between the two sides was first declared in 1997 and numerous rounds of negotiations held since.

They might even question the need for the extension of the ceasefire and further talks.

Some might even interpret the extension of the ceasefire for another six months as indicative of the fact that the problem would linger on with no end in sight. Others might, taking into account the uniqueness of the Indo-Naga problem, even say that the current truce extension for only six months is too short a time to settle the problem. Negotiators from both sides have their work cut out to dispel the fears and doubts of the people on the issue.

The first step towards this end could be proper implementation of the ceasefire ground rules. Here, it is noteworthy that the Government of India and the NSCN (I-M) have agreed to address all ceasefire issues including modification of ground rules. It can also be said that Nagaland has been neglected over the years

by successive governments at New Delhi after India's independence, resulting in the state remaining poor and backward, with few employment opportunities leading to discontent.

This feeling that New Delhi is willfully neglecting them also needs to be addressed if the Indo-Naga issue is to be settled. There is, however, a significant change in the Indian government's approach towards the problem.

The acceptance of the problem as basically a political issue, not that of a law and order problem arising out of the state's backwardness, as was the general perception earlier,

needing political resolution, is key to progressive and incremental change. The core problems may take time to be fully solved, but at the end of the day, it can be said that it is not the duration of time that can settle the issue but how well this time is used to bring about an amicable settlement.

The signals thus far, particularly with the extension of the ceasefire for another six months, are encouraging. They are also reminders that a spirit of trust and accountability can so easily melt antagonistic postures. And it is imperative that the talks between the Government of India and the NSCN (I-M) are based on such a spirit for the extended period of the ceasefire so that the truce is meaningfully utilised in the interests of both parties, the people of Nagaland, the rest of the North-east and India.

(The author is Editor, The Nagaland Page, published from Dimapur.)

Naga peace and Sholokhov

By Pradip Phanjoubam

Despite all the brinkmanship and the worries that things may go wrong, the outcome of the Bangkok talks between Government of India representatives and the leadership of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim was as expected.

The nearly nine-year-old ceasefire between the two parties has been extended by another six months on the day it was to expire, and there did not seem to be any other course it could have taken.

It is not a surprise that the welcome accorded to the news, both in Nagaland and in Manipur, was rather subdued. People heaved a sigh of relief, but showed little or no excitement, apart from lack lustre prayers that something would happen to make things happen.

The Nagaland Baptist Church Council, for instance, wel-

Open Forum

comed the truce extension but expressed disappointment that the ceasefire was becoming an end rather than a means. It also called the NSCN(I-M) to be realistic and broadminded, while also rapping its rivals for not going beyond close-ended criticisms.

This spirit was generally echoed in most other statements. Hopefully, indeed, a resolution will be reached at the end of this current leash, but it is still unimaginable how this can be so, considering the issues are so entangled.

What is perhaps needed is a completely new approach to the problem, like redrawing the paradigms altogether. Certain things are simply not possible and to think that the impossible is possible — it must be acknowledged by the parties concerned — is being unrealistic.

Perhaps, it will also be good for the parties involved to reflect on not just how to remove the hurdles before their visions, but more importantly, why these hurdles are there at all. How otherwise could nine years of negotiations have culminated in nobody moving from square one, and as the reports of this round of talks at Bangkok were testimony, there were nothing more than exchanges of allegations that either side was not playing by the rules.

But whatever else may have happened, at least the suspension of hostilities, if not peace, received another chance, and this is welcome. The distinction between

peace and suspension of hostilities is essential, for peace is much more than just the absence of overt violence, as latent violence, intimidation and other factors are also significant.

No one will disagree that the suspension of violence must be the first step to ushering in comprehensive peace.

The NSCN(I-M) leadership surely must be realising that the longer the stagnation remains, the deeper its problems would become.

If not for anything else, then for the fact that peace, even if partial, can be alluring and has a way of taming fighting men. No one can be more convincing in arguing this point out than the winner of the 1965 Nobel Prize for literature, Mikhail Sholokhov, in his celebrated short story, *The Foal*.

The story tells of the effect a foal born in battlefield to a mare amongst the steeds of a Russian cavalry during a campaign to suppress rebellious Cossacks, had on the troops. The cavalry commander wanted the foal shot for he feared the sight of the little one would remind his soldiers of home and soften them but none among the war-wearied soldiers succeeds in pulling the trigger.

In the days ahead, the foal — naughty, innocent and vulnerable — grows into the hearts of all, including the commander. They even go about protecting it from danger.

In the climactic scene, during a river crossing amidst a pitched gun-battle, a soldier tries to rescue the drowning foal. To everybody's surprise, the foal had the same effect on the enemies and nobody fired from the other side of the river while the rescue was on, except a single bullet that escapes the rifle of a nervous young Cossack which rips the chest of the rescuer, much to the horror of both sides.

Nine years is a long time to be home with the family for any man or woman of war. A young NSCN(I-M) guerrilla who might have married at the first scent of peace in 1997, would be with schoolgoing children today. He or she may not fear going back to the jungle again, but it is not so much fear that would be difficult to resolve. It is the memory of the warmth of home and hearth that will put a haze in her eyes.

Sometimes, hate is far easier to tackle than love. As the foal did to the Russian troops, the unspoken beckoning of children have the reputation of overriding the commands of commanders.

(The author is editor of The Imphal Free Press.)



Sense prevails

Naga truce never more relevant

Despite being livid with Delhi's incapability to respond suitably, the NSCN(IM) leadership's agreeing to extend the Nagaland ceasefire by yet another six months must come as a great relief to Nagas. As in July last year, they were on tenterhooks till 31 January, the day the truce was to expire, because non-renewal would have plunged Nagaland back into the bad old days and put several innocents at risk. In a way, the Naga leaders have reason to be tough in bargaining for extension as they feel they were tricked into accepting the truce in August 1997. But it is wrong to say that nothing "positive" has been achieved over the past eight and a half years; not only have the guns remained silent, the collective Naga leadership thrice visited India and interacted with their people. The truce's basic objective is to create an atmosphere conducive for talks and to that extent it has succeeded and assumes even more relevance. Of course constructive efforts have been made, but the sticking point remains the rigid Naga stand on a single administrative unit for the community. And with the three adjoining states — which feel territorial integrity is threatened and so are not prepared to come to terms — the problem does at times seem intractable. In such a situation the Centre cannot be expected to take a firm decision.

Most organisations favour integration but there are others also who feel the peace process is irrelevant given ground realities. Moreover, an accord with the NSCN(IM) will not be binding on all. The NSCN(IM) may ignore the existence of the parent Naga National Council and the Khaplang faction but the Centre cannot. If it does, it would mean more agonising nightmares for the Nagas. No one talks of reconciliation any more after the NSCN(IM) torpedoed the reconciliation committee. Now that the NSCN(IM) has reaffirmed its faith in the truce, the need of the hour is change in attitude.

4-point Naga poser to govt

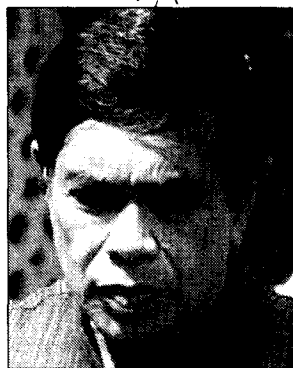
BHARAT BHUSHAN

Bangkok, Jan. 28: Caught in a bind because of its commitment to resolve the Naga issue peacefully and yet faced with a stalemate in the peace talks, the negotiators of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) today posed some blunt questions to their Indian counterparts.

In the first round of formal talks for ceasefire extension, Thuingaleng Muivah, general secretary of the NSCN (I-M), led a team of 14 negotiators to ask four basic questions to his Indian counterparts — minister of state for programme implementation Oscar Fernandes and former home secretary K. Padmanabhaiah.

The Nagas wanted to know: why should the ceasefire be extended if it does not serve any purpose? Why is the Indian government propping up groups trying to derail the peace process? Why has the government not come up with any response to their proposals for a settlement made as far back as 2001?

And, finally, what is Delhi willing to commit to the Nagas



Muivah (left), Fernandes: Point, counter-point

and within what time frame?

The answers to these questions, they said, will decide the fate of the ceasefire between the Naga outfit and the security forces. The ceasefire began in 1997. It has been extended by one year at a time, except in last July when the period was shortened to six months at the insistence of the NSCN (I-M).

However, this has failed to produce the desired pressure on New Delhi to reach a settlement. The ceasefire comes to an end on Tuesday, January 31. Although nobody seriously expects the Nagas to revoke the ceasefire, the NSCN (I-M)

leadership is under pressure to show results.

Muivah blames the Indian side for lack of progress, saying: "The last six months have been wilfully wasted. If the ceasefire is not serving the purpose at all, it is common sense to conclude that one cannot go for ceasefire for the sake of ceasefire."

Fernandes, who is also the leader of the group of ministers dealing with the NSCN (I-M), admitted that not much had been achieved. "But we hope that in the coming period we would be able to break some new ground," he said.

But, he pointed out, "you cannot deny though that barring a few incidents, peace and tranquillity has been maintained, a basic requirement for any negotiated settlement."

Agreeing with Fernandes, Muivah said: "A ceasefire agreement is for creating an atmosphere conducive to peace and therefore it must be taken seriously." However, he felt that the ceasefire entailed obligations which ought to have been fulfilled by both sides — suggesting that New Delhi was not keeping its part of the bargain.

"There have been some untoward incidents in the last six months and people are not at all happy. We take these violations seriously and I believe so does the Indian side," he said.

Padmanabhaiah, however, blamed the shortened ceasefire period for the lack of progress. "The shortened period created many misapprehensions and misinterpretations of the prevailing situation. A lot of time was spent on attending to the issues that arose out of this," he claimed.

Muivah dismissed the explanation.

THE TELEGRAPH

29 JAN 2006

DIFFICULT PEACE

To the militants in the North-east, violence is both the message and the medium. The latest series of blasts triggered by the United Liberation Front of Asom carries a disturbing message for the fledgling peace process. The blasts are not just a major blow to the peace initiative; these raise serious doubts about the outfit's desire for peace. It is morally wrong to argue, as the Assamese writer and chief initiator of the peace talks, Ms Indira Goswami, has done, that the violence reflects the Ulfa's frustration with the delay in the progress of the talks. In fact, such justifications of the group's violent methods would make things more difficult for the peace-makers. The latest violence would strengthen suspicions that the rebels actually want to use the peace talks as a ploy. And, such suspicions would lead the government to take a tougher position against them. Thus, New Delhi could read in the violence a very different message from the one intended by the Ulfa.

However, neither the Centre nor the state government should see the violence as the end of the peace process. To close the door on it would amount to submitting to the Ulfa's blackmail. The governments must not be seen as capitulating to violence and threats. At the same time, New Delhi or Dispur cannot afford to let the violence derail the peace initiative. The consultative group that the Ulfa chose to talk to the Centre on its behalf has to play a crucial role in taking the initiative forward. The members of the group also represent the civil society in Assam. They cannot ignore their obligations to the Assamese society at large. Instead of justifying the militants' violent ways, they should speak up against such tactics. After all, the Ulfa is bleeding Assam much more than it is hurting the Indian state. Coming so soon after the Rs 500 crore extortion threat to the Oil and Natural Gas Commission, the blasts make it almost impossible for New Delhi to consider a ceasefire in Assam. No responsible government can leave the people at the mercy of an outlawed group. The Ulfa's mediators have to bring better bargains at the peace table.

দাবি আলফারই, জানালেন পরেশ বরুয়া

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, গুয়াহাটি, ২০ জানুয়ারি: শেষ পর্যন্ত গোয়েন্দা পুলিশের ধারণাই সত্য হল। সংবাদ মাধ্যমকে ফোন করে আলফার সর্বাধিনায়ক পরেশ বরুয়া জানিয়ে দিলেন, ওএনজিসি-র কাছে ৫০০ কোটি টাকার দাবি তাঁরা করেছেন। এবং ওই 'সামান্য অঙ্কটা' তাদের দিতেই হবে। অন্যান্য কেন্দ্রীয় সংস্থার জন্যও বরুয়া একইরকম ভাবনার ইঙ্গিত দেওয়ায় নড়েচড়ে বসেছে রাজ্যের পুলিশ প্রশাসন।

এই ঘটনার পরে শান্তি আলোচনার 'অকাল মৃত্যু', এবং তার জেরে নতুন করে হাঙ্গামা ঘটতে পারে বলে অনেকেই আশঙ্কা। আজই রাত সাড়ে সাতটা নাগাদ গুয়াহাটিতে ইন্ডিয়ান অয়েল কর্পোরেশনের নুনমাটি শোধনাগারের গেটের সামনে বোমা ছোড়া হয়। এই বিস্ফোরণে সিআইএসএফের তিন জওয়ান, একজন ঠিকাদার ও একজন কর্মী

জখম হয়েছেন। প্রজাতন্ত্র দিবসে জঙ্গিরা গণ্ডগোল করতে পারে ধরে নিয়ে নিরাপত্তা বাড়ানো হয়েছে। আলফা এবং উত্তর-পূর্বের তিনটি জঙ্গি সংগঠন ২৫ জানুয়ারি সন্ধ্যে ৬টা থেকে ২৬ জানুয়ারি সন্ধ্যে ৬টা পর্যন্ত অসম, মণিপুর ও ত্রিপুরায় বনখের ডাকও দিয়েছে।

৫০০ কোটি টাকার জোড়া চিঠির খবর প্রকাশ পেলেও আলফা মুখ না-খোলায় চিঠির সত্যতা নিয়ে একশো শতাংশ নিশ্চিত হতে পারছিল না পুলিশ। 'সেই ধন্দের শুধু অবসান ঘটিয়ে, টেলিফোনে জঙ্গি-সুপ্রিমো বলেছেন, "অসমের সম্পদের উপর আমাদের, এ রাজ্যের মানুষের অধিকার আছে। তাই ওএনজিসি-র কাছে যে টাকা দাবি করা হয়েছে, তা তাদের দিতেই হবে। অসম থেকে গত কয়েক দশকে ওএনজিসি যে কোটি কোটি টাকা লুট করেছে, তার তুলনায় আমাদের দাবি সামান্যই।" এখানেই

না-থেকে অসমে কর্মরত অয়েল ইন্ডিয়া, কোল ইন্ডিয়া এবং বড় বেসরকারি সংস্থার ক্ষেত্রেও একইরকম ভাবনার ইঙ্গিত দিয়েছেন তিনি। তাঁর কথায়, "এখানকার বিপুল তেল ও গ্যাস-সম্পদের সদ্ব্যবহার করতে পারলে 'স্বাধীন অসম রাষ্ট্র' একটা ধনী দেশ হতে পারত।"

এক ওএনজিসি-র হুমকির চিঠিতে রক্ষে নেই, সেইসঙ্গে অন্য সংস্থাকেও হুমকি দেওয়ায় স্পষ্টতই পুলিশ প্রশাসনের কপালে ভাঁজ পড়েছে। গতকাল নুমালিগড় রিফাইনারি-সহ বিভিন্ন তেল সংস্থার সঙ্গে বৈঠক করে যাবতীয় নিরাপত্তার ব্যবস্থা করেছে পুলিশ। বরুয়ার ফোনের স্ক্রিনশটে প্রশাসন আজ উচ্চ পর্যায়ের সতর্কতা বসে। পুলিশ সূত্রে খবর, 'তৈলের সীমস্ত কেন্দ্র ও পাইপ লাইন পাহাড়ায় সিআইএসএফ-কে সাহায্য করার জন্য সিআরপিএফ এবং রাজ্য পুলিশকে নির্দেশ দেওয়া হয়েছে। অন্যান্য

জায়গাতেও নিরাপত্তা বাড়ানো হয়েছে। হায়দরাবাদ যাওয়ায় আগে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী তরুণ গগৈ অবশ্য বলেছেন, "ওএনজিসি থেকে আমরা বছরে ৫০ কোটি টাকার রয়্যাল্টি পাই। তাই তাদের রাজ্য ছাড়ার কোনও প্রস্তাবই ওঠেনা।" তিনি আলফার হুমকিকে 'দুর্ভাগ্যজনক' বলেছেন। আলফা নেতার ওই হুমকির মধ্যে অবশ্য অন্যায়ের কিছু দেখছেন না ইন্দিরা গোস্বামী। তাঁর কথায়, "তিন মাস আগে আলোচনা করে চূপচাপ রয়েছে কেন্দ্র। স্বভাবতই পরেশ বরুয়ার অপমানিত বোধ করবেনই।" ইন্দিরা মনে করেন, "আলোচনার বিষয়টি ঝুলিয়ে রেখে কেন্দ্র পরোক্ষে প্ররোচনা দিচ্ছে।"

পিসিজি-র একাধিক সদস্যের অভিমতও তাই। শান্তি আলোচনার বিষয়টি কেন্দ্র ঝুলিয়ে রাখায় প্রতিবাদ জানাতে এ মাসের শেষে গুয়াহাটিতে সমাবেশের ডাক দিয়েছে 'পিস ইনিসিয়েটিভ কমিটি'।

21 JAN 2008

ANADABAZAR PATHIKA

Ulfa calls to remind ONGC

9-11-06
P-6
OUR BUREAU

Jan. 19: The Ulfa has followed up its letter demanding Rs 500 crore from the ONGC with a telephone call enquiring about the payment.

Ominously, police also warned that the secessionist outfit was planning sabotage ahead of Republic Day.

Police sources said the ONGC's Assam asset headquarters at Nazira received an anonymous call. The caller identified himself as a senior member of the Ulfa's 28 battalion two days ago, asking about the payment.

The call came after the expiry of the 15-day deadline the rebels had set the company for making the payment in an extortion note dated January 1.

Confirming this, Assam director-general of police D.N. Dutta said: "A couple of days ago, after the expiry of the outfit's deadline, an ONGC official at Nazira received a phone call

about the payment."

The director-general of police, however, said the police were enquiring whether the call was indeed from the Ulfa.

ONGC chairman Subir Raha today said the Ulfa threat to the company was an issue that the Assam government was looking into.

Raha said the ONGC management had handed over the letter received by post to the local police.

Assam police were now investigating the letter, demanding Rs 500 crore from the ONGC as extortion money, he added.

He asserted that the ONGC's work schedule in Assam had not been affected in any way.

Senior officials added that the government's policy was not to give in to such demands.

They said security has been beefed up at all ONGC installations in the Northeast and safety of personnel and

equipment would be accorded highest priority.

Inspector-general of police (special branch) Khagen Sarma said preliminary investigation into the authenticity of the demand note indicated that the letter was issued by the Ulfa.

But in Jorhat, Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi said the veracity of the extortion notice was yet to be ascertained, adding that full protection has been provided to the ONGC.

When asked whether the Ulfa extortion demand to the ONGC could trip the ongoing peace process, Gogoi said it was very unfortunate that the outfit was still continuing with its anti-social activities at this crucial juncture, when a peace process was on.

In another development, Guwahati police last night arrested three Ulfa activists near Gauhati University and seized arms and ammunition from them.

20 JAN 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

SINGH A SONG: Four ITIs To Be Upgraded

Govt to okay gas project in Assam

Bikash Singh
GUWAHATI 16 JANUARY

PRIME Minister Manmohan Singh has announced a bagful of schemes for Assam. He said the Union Cabinet will soon clear the Assam gas cracker project which has already received clearance from the Public Investment Board (PIB). Dr Singh added the four Indian Technical Institutes (ITI) will be modernised. A nursing college and a central institute of design will be set up. The state government has asked for central assistance for colleges in architecture and accountancy.

The Prime Minister, on a two-day tour to Assam, said the Rs 5,400-crore gas cracker project will receive Cabinet nod very soon. "The Centre will also consider giving more powers to the Bodoland Territorial Council," he said. The Assam government wants the cost of land for the gas cracker project to be treated as its equity share. The project is likely to be cleared by the Centre in the next couple of weeks.

GAIL has sought several concessions for the project, including Rs 360 crore from the Centre and Rs 110 crore from the state government. It also wants a Rs 3,370-crore excise duty relief on purchase of feedstock naphtha and sale of product plus feedstock subsidies. For the same period, GAIL is looking at state government concessions worth Rs 977 crore.

According to the initial arrangement, GAIL, being the promoter, will have 70% stake, while the Assam government,

Numaligarh Refinery Ltd and Oil India Ltd (OIL) will have 10% share each. "The ministry of chemicals and fertiliser has prepared a memorandum which is likely to be cleared by the Union Cabinet very soon," GAIL sources said.

The gas cracker project at Lepetkata in Dibrugarh district of Upper Assam, has a history of roadblocks. The petrochemicals unit, estimated at Rs 5,400 crore, was planned as part of the 1985 Assam Accord. However, Reliance Assam Petrochemicals Ltd, the main promoter, backed out due to differences between the company and the potential gas suppliers. The Centre had promised to set up the two-lakh tonne per annum ethylene producing gas cracker project in 1985 through the Assam Accord. A Letter of Intent (LoI) was issued to the Assam Industrial Development Corporation on January 25, 1991.

According to GAIL assessment, inception of the 2,20,000 MTA ethylene gas cracker project would lead to the growth of plastic industry in the state. "The per capita consumption of plastic in North East is 1 kg compared to 4 kg in the rest of India and 13 kg in China," he said. However, the project hit another hurdle when the department of revenue (DoR) under the ministry of finance refused to grant central excise and customs duty exemption to the project. The department had opposed to any concession in excise and customs duties for the gas cracker project in Assam either on capital goods, final products or raw material for construction.



PM releases Rs 6,000 cr for Assam energy sector

Bikash Singh
GUWAHATI 16 JANUARY

THE energy sector of Assam will get an investment of Rs 6,000 crore. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Monday announced that Rs 3,000 will be invested by National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) for its proposed 500 MW Bongaigaon thermal power station and another Rs 3,000 will be spent on the expansion of the coalfields of the state. This is biggest-ever investment in the power sector in the newly formed Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

NTPC will use the local coals from the Margharita coalfield of the North Eastern coalfield (NEC) for its proposed 500-MW power plant in Assam. NTPC will require one million tonnes of coal annually for running the power plant.

The market value of one million tonnes of Margharita coal is estimated at Rs 132 crore. The Centre's investment of Rs 3,000 crore is basically meant for the expansion of the mining area and increasing the coal generation in the state. Assam has an estimated coal reserves of 2.4 billion tonnes. NTPC is planning to step up its power generation from 24,000 MW to 46,000 MW by 2012. It is planning to generate nearly 3,600 MW of power from North East.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh led the foundation stone of the thermal power plant in Assam. Assam presently has one thermal power station operating and has to rely heavily on the hydropower for meeting its energy requirement. More than 80% of its power requirement comes from hydro generation.

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The Economic Times

Mamoni asks Ulfa to clarify ONGC note

Bikash Singh

GUWAHATI 18 JAN JARY

MAMONI Raisom Goswami, facilitator of the Ulfa-Centre peace talks, has asked the outfit's leadership to clarify the authenticity of the Rs 500-crore demand note received by ONGC at its Upper Assam-based office.

Meanwhile, reports from Bhutan revealed suspected Ulfa militants has killed a village guide of the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA). This was the first strike back by the group, ever since the Himalayan kingdom launched an offensive



against Ulfa in 2003 and dismantled its camps.

Talking to ET, Dr Goswami said the letter's timing surprised her. "I have asked the Ulfa leadership to respond to the current controversy regarding the demand note on its letter head sent from its 28th battalion. I am expecting their response by Thursday," she said.

The crisis might be the handiwork of the anti-peace talk faction in the group, which was trying to sabotage the nascent peace process, she said. "I am in constant touch with the national security adviser, MK Narayanan. We will soon finalise the date for the second round of talks between the Ulfa-selected People Consultative Group and the Centre," she said.

Assam home commissioner, BK Gohain, said se-

curity in and around the ONGC installations in the Sivsagar and Jorhat districts has been beefed up. A company of additional forces were deployed there. "The deputy commissioner of the areas has been asked to take all precautionary security measures. The security agencies were verifying the authenticity of the Ulfa letter," he said.

A village guide, meanwhile, was killed, when suspected Ulfa militants opened fire at an RBA patrol team below Gerwa village in Samdrup Jongkhar near the Indo-Bhutan border. The guide,

Ugyen Wangdi, was with an RBA patrol team, searching the area below the village when they were fired upon. Ugyen Wangdi sustained bullet injuries and died.

A day before the encounter a villager had reported seeing three armed men in the forest below the village. An army spokesman said the firing on the patrol was suspected to have been carried out by Ulfa militants. Both Oil India Ltd and ONGC spent more than Rs 20 lakh annually, each, on security of oil establishments in the state.

ONGC had earlier offered a pact with the Assam and Tripura governments for raising an exclusive battalion in the respective states to protect its assets in North East. Assam agreed to provide logistical support for the new battalion.

Ulfa demands Rs 500 crore, ONGC prefers to keep mum

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, January 16

BARELY FIVE days after killing a Royal Bhutan Army scout announcing the re-establishment of its bases in the Dragon Kingdom, the outlawed Ulfa has made another statement — that it has been keeping its extortion machinery well-oiled despite dangling a near-truce candy.

According to reports in local dailies here, the Ulfa has served a whopping Rs 500-crore demand note to the ONGC, which runs its Assam Asset operations from Nazira in Sivasagar district. ONGC officials here have neither denied nor admitted to receiving the extortion notice, shifting the onus of explanation to “bosses in New Delhi and Dehra Dun”. However, the reports have quoted home de-

partment officials as saying that ONGC offshore chairman A.K. Hazarika and security adviser T.N. Mishra had formally intimidated them about the Ulfa “love letter” and sought airtight security for employees of the oil major.

Although senior police officers said they were trying to establish the veracity of the demand notice, they said a pipeline blast (on the eve of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit) that preceded it was “too coincidental”. The Ulfa did not own up to the blast, but the site selected — near Palasguri village in Chirang district adjoining Bhutan — was strategic for militants to strike from bases in Bhutan.

Incidentally, officials of the oil companies had often been the targets of extortion and abductions by sundry militant outfits — much like the tea ex-

ecutives. The NSCN had, in the 1990s, extorted the ONGC out of its wells in Nagaland. And one of the first high-profile persons to be killed by the Ulfa during its heydays was an ONGC officer.

Meanwhile, government officials said the ONGC’s pledge last year to invest Rs 3,000 crore in the Northeast to increase its crude oil and natural gas yield could have prompted the Ulfa to serve the notice demanding the unusually huge sum. Along with OIL, which has about 700 wells, the ONGC produces about 5 million tons of crude oil in Assam. This accounts for approximately 13 per cent of India’s total oil production. OIL has a few wells in Arunachal Pradesh, while ONGC has several in Nagaland, which is believed to be sitting on more oil than Assam.

15 JAN 2005
THE ASSAM TIMES

Assam Cong moves to amend Foreigners' Act

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Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Jan. 12. — As the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983, stands dismissed by the Supreme Court verdict delivered on July last year, the ruling Congress in Assam is now moving for an amendment to the Foreigners' Act to provide "legal safeguards" to minorities against harassment during detection and deportation of illegal immigrants.

The Supreme Court verdict against the IMDT Act was a major setback for the Congress which had the legislation enacted during the heady days of All Assam Students' Union (Aasu)-led Assam agitation against illegal Bangladeshi immigrants.

Since then the Act had been instrumental for the party to project itself as the messiah of the minority community in the state reeling under unabated illegal migration from Bangladesh.

The Act was struck down by the court despite strong opposition from the Congress putting the latter in a tight spot vis-à-

vis bastion among the minorities. Ever since the IMDT Act was struck down, the Congress has been trying to find a way to keep its minority bastion intact. Assam chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi has already disclosed that the party would seek "minor" amendments to the Foreigners' Act in order to ensure legal safeguard to Indian minorities in the wake of the repeal of the IMDT Act.

He said the Congress would bring "some changes" in the working of the Supreme Court verdict through the Union Cabinet in order to provide legal safeguard to the Indian minorities through the tribunals.

The ruling party wants to make it mandatory that all cases of detecting Bangladeshi immigrants be referred to foreigners tribunals.

However, the move taken by the Congress has been greeted with sharp reactions in the state especially from the Aasu and said the Foreigners Act is nothing but an attempt to reintroduce IMDT Act in a new form.

Mizo key to Ulfa problem

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Jan. 8. — Union defence minister Mr Pranab Mukherjee today hinted that the Centre might adopt a policy similar to that was adopted in Mizoram — to solve the problem of the rebel Mizo National Front (MNF) in late 1980s — to solve the Ulfa insurgency problem in Assam.

Mr Mukherjee, while addressing the rally organised by the Congress here, said: "Solution to the two-decade old Ulfa insurgency problem in Assam could perhaps be found from the Centre's of Mizoram."

He lauded the party government in Assam headed by chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi for being able to handle the insurgency problem effectively and not allowing the problem to stymie the development process during the last few years.

He pointed out that the incumbent Assam government was successful in facilitating peace process with a number of militant outfits like National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and hoped that the Ulfa problem too would be solved soon through a peace process.

"It is our duty to address to the grievances of the misguided youths of our society," the defence minister stated as a solution to the insurgency problem. Reminding the people of the glorious history of bravery and sacrifice of the people of the state, Mr Mukherjee said, Assam could be held as an image of India for its different communities and cultural resources.

He said the Centre was taking steps to set up tribunals to deal with detection and deportation of illegal immigrants as directed by the Supreme Court while scrapping the IM(DT) Act and stated that steps would also be taken to ensure that

no genuine citizen of the country was subjected to harassment in dealing with the problem of illegal immigrants in the post IMDT Act period

no genuine citizen of the country was subjected to harassment in dealing with the problem of illegal immigrants in the post IMDT Act period.

The defence minister raised hopes for the crisis-ridden tea industry in Assam while saying that the Centre would soon provide a special package to Assam to bail out the state's crisis-ridden tea industry and that the commerce minister Mr Kamal Nath was expected to make an announcement about the package soon.

The tea industry in Assam is in deep trouble because of the continuing slump in prices of Assam tea in domestic and international market for the last few years. The state produces about 55 per cent of the total volume of tea in the country. The industry which is the biggest employer in the state directly employs about 10 lakh people including about 8 lakh workers. Congress enjoys a traditional support amongst the tea workers in the state.

The ruling Congress virtually kicked off its election campaign by holding the massive rally which was addressed by all senior party leaders in the state besides Mr Mukherjee, Union minister for heavy industries and water resources, Mr Santosh Mohan Deb and AICC leader Mr Digvijay Singh.

9 JAN 2006

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Naga council wants Centre to respond positively to its formula

Next round of talks crucial as ceasefire will expire on January 31

Sushanta Talukdar

GUWAHATI: The National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Mui-vah) on Thursday said it would expect the Union Government to come out with a positive response to the formula already put forward by the rebel group for resolving the "Indo-Naga conflict." Both sides are scheduled to meet for the next round of talks in the middle of January.

Deputy "Kilonser" (minister) in the "Kilo" (Home) Ministry of the NSCN (IM)-run parallel government, V. Horam told *The Hindu* over cell phone from the outfit's Hebron Camp in Nagaland that the next round of talks would be crucial as the ceasefire would expire on January 31.

The formula put forward before New Delhi by the Naga rebel group is that "India and Nagalim are going to be two nations but inseparable. But the pattern of relationship would be determined by the outcome of the talks and agreement to be made."

Mr. Horam said the NSCN (IM) had also proposed a nomenclature, "Federation of In-

dia and Nagalim" for the proposed nation that would comprise "Naga traditional territories."

He said the NSCN (IM) would explore all possibilities for sustaining the dialogue but everything would depend on New Delhi's response to the formula. The NSCN (IM) had signed a ceasefire agreement with the Centre in July 1997.

"It has been more than eight years and the peace negotiation has reached a stalemate as the Indian Government has not responded to our formula of resolving the Indo-Naga conflict."

The Amsterdam-based Naga International Support Centre (NSIC) on Wednesday called on the NSCN-run parallel government "in the wake of the mounting pressure to remain subdued, to do all in its power to restrain

itself and to keep the ceasefire going so talks for peace will remain possible, and bloodshed will be averted."

The peace talks ran into rough weather after the Centre's emissaries Oscar Fernandes and K. Padmanabhaiah failed to convince the NSCN (IM) leaders in the last round of talks held in Bangkok in December last year for an extension of the ceasefire.

The Amsterdam-based human rights organisation also called on the United Nations to "intervene in this long-standing conflict on the basis of the right to self determination." The NSIC claimed, in a telegram to the United Nations, that the Nagas declared independence one day ahead of India. "Though the United Nations acknowledged the reception of that declaration it did not act on it," it added.

• The formula is to resolve Indo-Naga conflict

• Next round of talks in mid-January is crucial

• Outcome to decide on the pattern of relationship

• The July 1997 ceasefire is due to expire on January 31

নাগা জঙ্গিদের সঙ্গে চুক্তির মেয়াদ শেষ হচ্ছে, বাড়ছে উত্তেজনা

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, আগরতলা, ৩১ ডিসেম্বর: জানুয়ারি মাসেই শেষ হয়ে যাচ্ছে নাগা জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠী এনএসসিএন (আই-এম) ও কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের মধ্যে অস্ত্রবিরতি চুক্তির মেয়াদ। তার আগে আরও একবার দিল্লির প্রতিনিধিদের সঙ্গে বিদেশে বৈঠক করতে সম্মত হয়েছেন আই-এম নেতৃত্ব। এই নিয়ে মোট ৩৮ দফা বৈঠক হবে দু'পক্ষে। সেই বৈঠকই হবে চূড়ান্ত, সেখানে ফয়সলা না হলে দিল্লিবিরোধী আন্দোলন শুরু হবে—এমন কথা রটেছে নাগাল্যান্ডে। এ ব্যাপারে নিরাপত্তা বাহিনী সতর্ক রয়েছে। নাগাল্যান্ড ও তার পার্শ্ববর্তী সব ক'টি রাজ্যে মোতামেন নিরাপত্তা বাহিনীও সেইমত প্রস্তুতি নিতে শুরু করেছে। বিপদ আঁচ করে কোহিমায় সর্বোচ্চ নাগা সংগঠন আশাপ্রকাশ করে বলেছে, শান্তি-বৈঠক থেকে নাগাদের সরে আসা ঠিক হবে না।

১৯৯৭ সালের ১ অগস্ট কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের সঙ্গে আই-এম গোষ্ঠীর অস্ত্রবিরতি চুক্তি হয়। ক্রমে ক্রমে চলতি বছরের ৩১ জুলাই অবধি চুক্তির মেয়াদ বাড়ানো হয়। চুক্তির মেয়াদ একবছর করে বাড়ানোর প্রথা ছিল। কিন্তু ভারত সরকার তা কমিয়ে ছ'মাসের জন্য করার

প্রস্তাব দিলে তা-ও মেনে নেন জঙ্গি নেতারা। দিল্লির দিক থেকে অপরাপক্ষের কাছে নাগা সমস্যার সমাধানে সদিচ্ছা প্রমাণের জন্য চুক্তির মেয়াদ ক্রমে ক্রমে ছোট করে আনা হয়।

চলতি মাসে ব্যাঙ্ককে এনএসসিএনের আইজাক চিসি সু ও থুইঙ্গালেং মুইভা-সহ মোট ১৭ জন নেতার সঙ্গে বৈঠক করেন কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রী অঙ্কার ফার্নান্ডেজ ও অফিসারেরা। তাতে বরফ না-গলায় মুইভা বিরক্তি প্রকাশ করে বলেন, তৃতীয় কোনও দেশের মধ্যস্থতা ছাড়া নাগা সমস্যার সমাধান সম্ভব নয়। একইসঙ্গে নাগাল্যান্ডে বিভিন্ন সংগঠনের কাছেও জঙ্গি নেতারা বার্তা পাঠান 'দিল্লির লেজে খেলানো' কৌশলের প্রতিবাদ গড়ে তোলার জন্য। এরপরেই বিভিন্ন সংগঠন গরম গরম বিবৃতি দিতে শুরু করে। ফলে, গোটা পরিস্থিতি একেবারেই সুবিধের নয়, স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রকে এই রিপোর্টই পাঠায় ডিমাপুরের সেনা গোয়েন্দা বিভাগ।

আগামী ৩১ জানুয়ারি চুক্তির মেয়াদ শেষ হওয়ার দিন। সেনাবাহিনীর এক সূত্র জানান, চুক্তির মেয়াদ শেষ হওয়ার আগেই জঙ্গিরা নাগাল্যান্ড-মণিপুরের পথে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ

সেতু, সড়কে হামলা চালাতে পারে। সরকারি দফতরেও হামলার আশঙ্কা রয়েছে। এ নিয়ে সম্প্রতি ইফলে সব ক'টি নিরাপত্তা বাহিনীর যৌথ কমান্ডের বৈঠকে বিস্তারিত কথা হয়। ওই বৈঠকে পৌরহিত্য করেন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ওকরাম ইবোবি সিংহ। একই ভাবে অসম রাইফেলসের (উত্তর) আইজি মেজর জেনারেল এস এস কুমার শিলংয়ে সম্প্রতি নাগাল্যান্ড ও মণিপুরে মোতামেন সব ব্যাটালিয়নের প্রধানদের ডেকে বৈঠক করেন। সেনা সূত্রটি জানান, মণিপুরের নাগা অধ্যুষিত চার পাহাড়ি জেলা ও গোটা নাগাল্যান্ডের সবক'টি জেলার প্রত্যন্ত অঞ্চল অবধি নিরাপত্তা বাহিনীকে 'চূড়ান্ত সতর্ক' করে দেওয়া হয়েছে।

পরিস্থিতি দেখে প্রমাদ গণেছেন নাগাদের সর্বোচ্চ সংগঠন নাগা হো-র নেতৃত্ব। সংগঠনের সহসভাপতি কেভিলেটুও কিছুরো এক লিখিত বিবৃতিতে বলেন, "নাগাদের এত অসহিষ্ণু হওয়া উচিত নয়। অনেকে পছন্দ না করলেও অস্ত্রবিরতি চুক্তির মেয়াদ আরও বাড়ানো দরকার। এ ছাড়া নাগা নেতারা কথা চালাতে পারবেন না।" আর এক প্রভাবশালী সংগঠন নাগা ব্যাপটিস্ট চার্চ কাউন্সিলের পিস অ্যাফেয়ার্স বিভাগের প্রধান রেভারেন্ড ক্যারি লঙ্কার বিবৃতি দিয়ে বলেছেন, "এখনও নাগাদের রাজনৈতিক আশা-আকাঙ্ক্ষা নিয়ে কথাবার্তা সম্পূর্ণ হল না, তার আগে অস্ত্রবিরতি থেকে সরে আসতে নেতাদের যারা পরামর্শ দিচ্ছে, তারা নাগাদের মিত্র হতে পারে না।" তিনি আরও বলেন, "কেন্দ্র শান্তি চায় না, এ কথা ঠিক নয়। দিল্লির উদ্যোগকে নাগাদের সমর্থন জানানো উচিত।"

DELHI

THE HINDU • SUNDAY, JANUARY 1, 2006

Rail linking Sindh, Rajasthan by mid-January

E. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD: The Munabao-Khokrapar rail route linking Sindh to Rajasthan would open by the middle of January.

Pakistan Railways Minister Mian Shauqat Haider told the upper house of Parliament on Saturday that preparations were in full swing to make the second rail link between Pakistan and India operational.

Mr. Haider said the new train would reduce travel time for passengers who want to travel to or from southern Pakistan, as compared to the present arrangements through the Wagah border.

In the aftermath of the revived dialogue process since January 2004, India and Pakistan agreed to re-open the rail link that was shut down after the 1965 war.

Opening of consulates

Manipur IGP shot dead by insurgents

Killers escape from Oinam market under cover of fog

Correspondent

IMPHAL: Insurgents shot dead Manipur Inspector-General of Police (Intelligence) T. Thangtham and his escort commander at the Oinam market in Bishnupur district, about 20 km from here, on Saturday morning.

The police said Mr. Thangtham and S. Khanjam died on the spot as the insurgents opened fire from automatic weapons.

Three security personnel were injured. The killers escaped under cover of fog.

Trailed for some distance

The IGP had gone home in Churachandpur district on Friday to bring his son and daughter-in-law. On their way back, they reached Oinam around 8.45 a.m.

One truck had trailed the car of the IGP and two escorts for some distance.

At the market, when the insurgents opened fire, the escort personnel retaliated.

The fleeing attackers also fired indiscriminately at some CRPF trucks, which were passing by. However, there was no casualty.

An additional force rushed to the scene and was conducting combing operations in nearby villages suspected of being hide-outs.

Chief Minister Okram Ibobi who holds the Home portfolio, said he had instructed the police to nab the insurgents.

PTI reports:

Official sources said the insurgents escaped towards the Leimatak hill area, about 40 km from here.

The injured personnel were taken to the Regional Institute of Medical Science Hospital here, where their condition was stated to be out of danger.

GRIEF-STRICKEN: Family members grieve over the body of Manipur's Inspector-General of Police (Intelligence) T. Thanatham on Saturday.

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