

**NORTH - EAST INDIA:
PROBLEMS, POLICIES AND PROSPECTS**

**NORTH - EAST INDIA:
PROBLEMS, POLICIES AND PROSPECTS :
SINCE INDEPENDENCE**

by

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Preface

Since the Transfer of Power India's North-east came into prominence and geo-political significance as it bordered three unfriendly countries—China, Burma (now Myanmar) and East Pakistan (present Bangladesh). For decades the entire region was in the throes of tension and turmoil. This book seeks to identify the problems and to analyse and assess the policies of the Union and State governments in the post-colonial period to ensure peace, security and stability of this strategically important sensitive region.

The restructuring of the States on linguistic basis did not find favour with the newly-emerged elite of the tribals in the hills: it deprived them, as they felt, of their political and cultural identity in the context of the territory composed of diverse ethnic groups at different economic levels and political development. The Sixth Schedule devised to satisfy their needs and aspirations within the framework of the parent State could not meet their demands. Hence followed the fragmentation of Assam with the emergence of Nagaland as a full-fledged State in 1964. The Assam Reorganisation and the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 which created five States and two Union Territories (now States) could not but inspire Karbi-Anglong and North Cachar Hills and the tribesmen in the plains to make demands of autonomy as a stepping stone to Statehood. To what extent the balkanisation of Assam thus set in motion, provided a appropriate solution or created new problems; answers to this question will be found in succeeding pages.

The influx of immigrants in the wake of the partition of India and the emergence of Bangladesh had created an explosive situation upsetting the demographic balance in the north-east. If the inflow remained unbated, the plainsmen felt, they will be aliens in their homeland and their very identity will be lost. The hillmen also feared they will be outnumbered and swamped; their main prop. the land and forests will also be lost to them. The inevitable reaction, an anti-foreigner's drive paralysed the government and then followed in its wake an orgy of violence, looting, arson and killings which took a heavy toll of human lives and loss of property worth millions. What is the nature and extent of the influx of immigrants? Is the identity of the ethnic groups, including the major community namely the Assamese, really in danger? What was the rôle of the political parties including the party in power? How and with what effect the Union and the

State governments tackled the problem? Is the problem of influx insoluble? These are some of the questions which this book seeks to explain.

There had also been a growing sense of alienation bred by geographical isolation, communication gap and above all prolonged neglect and indifference of the Union government. Small wonder that the region is seething with secessionism, militancy and insurgency. The endeavours that had been made by the Union and State governments to bring the ultras to the negotiating table bore no fruit. The policy of the government, the author strongly feels, should be conciliatory but firm. Conciliate to the utmost, not by words but by deeds, eradicating feelings of alienation, deprivation and neglect. Conciliation should not be perverted to appeasement which is a sign of weakness. If conciliation fails, the divisive and secessionist forces must be brought under control with an iron hand and in the process, care should be taken, the innocents should not be punished along with the guilty.

The current or contemporary history is yet to attract the attention of the Indian historiographer. He is to deal with the raw data, 'proximity of events and personalities' and 'involvement of events and happenings' around him. There is nothing like a final verdict in history: for a better perspective and understanding history is being reassessed, reinterpreted and reconstructed from time to time in the light of new sources unearthed. True, a historian may discover facts which may be of vital importance to him for explorations of truth or express a judgement which may adversely affect interests at certain quarters or powers that be. The author strongly feels, history is no respecter of persons and that the duty of a historian is to lay bare facts or pass a judgement without fear or favour. Under no circumstances should he suppress or distort facts to suit interests personal, political or communal. Clio has no other interest than the search for the truth, the whole truth, irrespective of national, religious, linguistic or regional considerations. Above all, his findings must serve the interests of the community by removing misunderstanding, strengthening views and enlightening the public on both its strong and weak points.

Archival materials on North-east are not accessible to scholars for the period under review. Annual, quinquennial reports, and documents of historical importance remain unpublished nor readily available. The present analysis is based by and large on reports, official and unofficial, monographs, brochures, scholarly papers and articles published in journals, periodicals and media, local and national. These are invaluable source materials for the subject under discussion based as these are on personal

(vii)

knowledge or on the reports of those who had witnessed the events. Grateful thanks are due to all those whose pioneering works the author extensively made use of.

Chandmari : GUWAHATI

H.K. Barpujari

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Abbreviations Used

AAPSU, All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union

AAMSU, All Assam Minority Students Union

AASU, All Assam Students Union

AAGSP, All Asom Gana Sangram Parishad

ABSU, All Boro Students Union

AGP, Asom Gana Parishad

AJD, Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal

AJYCP, Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad

ALMA, A'chik Liberation Matgrik Army (Garo Hills)

AMSU, All Manipuri Students Union

APHLC, All Party Hill Leaders Conference (Meghalaya)

ASDC, Autonomous State Demand Committee (Karbi - Anglong)

ASR, Assam Secretariat Records

ATTF, All Tripura Tiger Force

BAC, Boro Autonomous Council

Barpujari, H.K. Barpujari

BPSMC, Boro People's Statehood Movement Council

Br. SF, Boro Security Force

BSF, Border Security Force

BSMC, Boroland State Movement Council

BSS, Boro Sahitya Sabha.

CEC, Chief Election Commissioner

CENSUS, Census of India, Report (Assam), Part III

CHT, Chittagong Hill Tract

CPI, Communist Party of India

CPI (M) Communist Party (Marxist)

CRPF, Central Reserve Police

Deka, Kanak Sen Deka

DHD, Dima Halam Danga (N.C. Hills)

EITU, Eastern India Tribal Union

Gupta, Shekhar Gupta

HALC, Hynniewtrep A'chik Liberation Council (Khasi Hills)

HSPDP, Hill States People Democratic Party

Hazarika, Sanjoy Hazarika

Hill Tribes, Problem of Hill Tribes, North Eastern Frontier

HPC, Hmar People's Convention

IBRF, Indo- Burmese Revolutionary Force

IFC, Indian Armed Forces

IM(DT) Illegal Migrant (Determination by Tribunals) Act

IOR, India Office Records

ISI, Inter Services Intelligence (Pakistan)

Judicial Enquiry, Judicial Enquiry under Chairmanship of T.U. Mehta

KASDC, Karbi Autonomous State Demand Committee

KCP, Kangleipak Communist Party (Manipur)

KIA, Kachin Independent Army (Myanmar)

KNA, Kuki National Army (Manipur)

KNV, Karbi National Volunteers (Karbi - Anglong)

KSU, Khasi Students Union

MNF, Mizo National Front

Menon, Romesh Menon

Murty, T.S. Murty

Nayar, Kuldip Nayar

NDFB, National Democratic Front of Boroland

NEC, North-Eastern Council

NEDFI, North Eastern Development Financial Coporation Ltd.

NEEPCO, North Eastern Electric Power Corporation

NEFA, North East Frontier Agency

NEIHA, North East India History Association

NEICSSR, North East India Council of Social Science Research

NESCC, North-Eash Student's Co-ordination Committee

NLD, National League for Democracy (Myanmar)

NLFT, National Liberation Front of Tripura

NNC, Naga National Council

NNO, Naga National Organisation

NPC, Naga People Convention

NSCN (K) National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang)

____ (M) National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Muivah)

NSF, Naga Students Federation

PDF, People's Democratic Front (Boro)

PLA, People's Liberation Army (Manipur)

PLP, Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad

PREPAK, Peoples Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (Manipur)

Prabhakara, M.S. Prabhakara

PTCA, Plains Tribal Council of Assam

RAW, Research and Analysis Wing

RPF, Revolutionary Peoples Front (Manipur)

Rustomji, Nari Rustomji

SDUF, Self-Defence United Front of South - East Himalayan Region

***SHDC*, Singlung Hill Development Council**

***SLORC*, State Law and Order Restoration Council (Myanmar)**

***SRC*, State Reorganisation Commission**

***SULFA*, Surrendered United Liberation Front of Assam**

***Tewari Commission*, The Commission of Enquiry under Chairmanship of
Tribhuvan Prasad Tewari**

•*TNV*, Tribal National Volunteers (Tripura)

***TUJS*, Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti**

***UDF* United Democratic Front**

***UMF*, United Minority Front**

***UNI*, United News Agency of India**

***UNLF*, United Liberation Front (Manipur)**

***UNPO*, Unrepresented Nations Peoples Organisation**

***UPPA*, United People's Party of Assam**

***Verghese*, B.K. Verghese**

The Reorganisation of States

The territorial changes were made in India, students of Indo-British history are well aware, as a result of accident following the growth of British power in India. These were designed to serve imperial interests administrative, economic, strategic and military, not in the interest of the needs, wishes and aspirations of the people. With phenomenal development of regional languages in the nineteenth century, there had been an increasing demand for the redistribution of Indian provinces on regional lines. The Montagu-Chelmsford Report, 1918, commended that 'the business of the Government could be simplified if administrative units were both smaller and more homogeneous... It is also a strong argument in favour of linguistic or racial units of government that by it possible to conduct the business of legislation in the vernacular, they would contribute to draw into the area of public affairs men who were not acquainted with English'¹. Notwithstanding the difficulties to be encountered in the State reorganisation and financial implications, the *Indian Statutory Commission*, 1930, made definite recommendation 'for reviewing and, if possible, resettling the the provincial boundaries' as early as possible, and that race, religion, economic interest, geographical contiguity should be factors which should govern redistribution². The Indian National Congress (INC) indirectly supported the linguistic principle in 1905 when it demanded the annulment of the Partition of Bengal.³ In its Nagpur session 1920, the Congress recommended that 'time has come for redistribution of provinces on linguistic basis', and this was reiterated in its sessions Calcutta 1937, Wardha 1938 and in its election manifesto 1945-46.

There had been a radical change in the perception of the Congress leaders in the wake of the new problems after the Partition of India demanding serious consideration on implementation of earlier commitments. The question was examined by the *Linguistic Provinces Commission* of the Constituent Assembly or the *Dar Commission*, July -

-
1. *Report on Indian Constitutional Reform*, 1918, para 246.
 2. *Report of the Indian Statutory Commission*, ii, para, 25.
 3. Sitaramayya, P., *History of Indian National Congress*, i, 62.

December 1948. The Commission considered it 'inadvisable' under prevailing circumstances as the country had then to face more important problems of defence, refugees, food, inflation and production. Moreover redistribution of States required a great deal of preparation and planning for which administrative personnel then available was not adequate. In forming provinces, the Commission also felt that emphasis should primarily be given on administrative convenience. Apart from homogeneity of language, stress should be given to history, geography, economy and cultural mores.⁴ At the Nagpur session of the Congress, 1948, a committee was appointed consisting of Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Pattabi Sitarammya, the *JVP Committee*, to consider in the light of the new problems that had arisen after Indian Independence and in the context of the report of the Dar Commission. Concurring in the recommendation of the Commission, the Committee recorded a note of warning against linguistic provinces and emphasised on security, unity and economic prosperity of India and that every separatist or disruptive tendency be regorously discouraged.⁵

In spite of qualified support of the Dar Commission and I.V.P. Committee, the Ministry of Home, Government of India, had to go ahead with the scheme of reorganisation of States on linguistic basis. The reasons were not far to seek. Linguistic redistribution of States had been a part of Indian National Movement. It had gone deep into the minds of the masses, any reversal of the process 'would lead to a frustration with serious consequences'. This had become all the more necessary since India with her programme of large scale planning demanded 'enduring permanent Units'. In view of uncertainties there existed a general reluctance to invest funds in disputed areas.⁶ *The States Reorganisation Commission* (SRC) appointed by a Resolution of the Ministry of Home, 29 December 1953, with Sayyid Fazl Ali (*Chairman*), H.N. Kunjru and K.M. Panikkar, was required to examine 'objectively and dispassionately' the question of reorganisation of States of the Indian Union. The Commission issued a Press Note on 22 February 1954, inviting written memorandum from members of the public and private association interested in the problem of reorganisation of States. Of the basic principles to be kept in view in the reorganisation of State the Press Note laid down :

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4. Cited in the *Report of the Linguistic Provinces Commission*, paras 131, 147.
 5. *Ibid*, 2-7.
 6. *Report of the States Reorganisation Commission*, 1955 ; Introduction and Appendix A., Resolution of the Ministry of Home Affairs, 29 December 1953.

The language and culture of an area have an undoubted importance as they represent a pattern of living which is common in that area. In considering reorganisation of States, however, there are other important factors which have also to be borne in mind. The first essential consideration is the preservation and strengthening of the unity and security of India. Financial, economic and administrative considerations are almost equally important not only from the point of view of each State but for the whole nation. India had embarked upon a great ordered plan for economic, cultural and moral progress. Changes which interfered with the successful prosecution of such a national plan would be harmful to the national interest.⁷

In a federal plan, advocates of the linguistic States believe, the constituent States must possess a minimum degree of homogeneity to ensure emotional integration so necessary for the working of democratic institutions. That a multiplicity of such languages would tend to weakness and inefficiency in administration and rivalry and jealousy in politics. Linguistic States, therefore, 'is the only national basis for restructuring the States as it reflects the social and cultural pattern in well defined regions of the country'. Therefore, in a democratic set-up like that of India based on universal adult suffrage the political, administrative and academic activities of the States should be conducted in regional language. On the otherhand, linguistic principle tends to encourage exclusiveness. It impedes if not obliterate feelings of national unity with its emphasis on local culture, history and language. Instances are too many, States based on languages are intolerant, aggressive and expansionist in character, 'a sense of irredentism' is discernible in unilingual States claiming neighbouring territories on the basis of linguistic statistics.⁸ The policy-makers in New Delhi utterly failed to realise that in a multi-racial and multi-lingual country like India, erection of linguistic States would unlock Pandora's box for further division of the country destroying her unity and integrity and opening up flood-gates of racism, linguism and parochialism and in its train arson, violence and killings. This had happened in many parts of India and is happening even now in North-east India which will be unfolded in subsequent pages.

In its memorandum to SRC, the Government of Assam represented to maintain the *status quo* : of course it would welcome the merger, if

7. *Ibid.*, Appendix B., See Press Note.

8. *Ibid.*, Chap. II and III.

possible Cooch Behar, Manipur, Tripura and close connection with North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA). Proposals were made for the formation of a Kamatapur State consisting of Goalpara, Garo Hills, Cooch Behar, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri besides a Purbachal State consisting of areas in and around Cachar⁹. In a conference held at Tura, October 1954, Hill leaders led by Williamson Sangma resolved to submit a memorandum to SRC demanding a Hill State on the ground that the Sixth Schedule did not endow the autonomous districts with adequate powers to safeguard their interests social, economic and political.¹⁰

The Commission was guided by the principle that a border State should be a well-administered, stable and resourceful unit capable of meeting emergent problems arising out of military exigencies. 'It should be safer to have in our border relatively larger and resourceful States rather than small and less resilient units'. In spite of her multi-racial and multi-linguistic character, therefore, it recommended that the new State of Assam will include all the existing areas and include Tripura (about 89,040 square miles) which cannot stand by itself. Though Bengali is the language of the majority of the people, West Bengal was not interested in this territory and its merger with Assam, the Commission thought, would bring the entire border between India and Pakistan, under one single control, namely Government of Assam. The proposed Purbachal State consisting of Cachar, Tripura, Lushai (Mizo) Hills, Naga Hills, Manipur and NEFA, having international boundaries on three sides, it was felt, will have neither resources nor stability to the border areas. On the same ground creation of Kamatapur was not acceptable. The integration of NEFA was not feasible as a special kind of administration was contemplated for this frontier province¹¹. In regard to the demand for a separate hill State, the Commission was strongly of opinion that the hill districts will not be able to mobilize, despite reasonable grant from the Centre, the necessary resources, both human and physical, to implement successive development schemes. In its view, the separation will add to the cost of administration and render difficult coordination of policies and programmes between the State of Assam and hill areas, on the one hand, and the hill districts themselves, on the other. Moreover, it was found with the exception of Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, tribes in other areas were not

9. *Ibid.*, Chap. XVI, 183 f.

10. *Infra*, 14

11. *Op. Cit.*, 183f.

in favour of separation. The scheme was, therefore, considered 'neither feasible nor in the interest of the tribal people themselves'.¹² The Commission's recommendation with regard to Assam and hill areas was accepted by the Government of India. Tripura and Manipur were made Part C States in the Indian Union. NEFA was retained as the Frontier Agency and later turned into Union territory of Arunachal Pradesh.

The Commission held the view that the *Inner Line Regulations* were introduced ostensibly 'to discourage unnecessary interference with and economic exploitation of the tribal people'; in reality 'to exclude all contact, between them and the inhabitants of the plains'¹³. A perusal of the archival materials will reveal that the *Regulations* did not aim at segregating the people of the hills from those of the plains, but 'to check the overzealous military officer's advance to dangerous and exposed positions' which had been the source of complications with the frontier tribes. The district officers were told not to¹⁴ extend their effective jurisdiction upto the Line and beyond it;

the tribes.. should be left to manage their own affairs with only such interference politically on the part of our officers as may be calculated to establish personal influence for good among the chiefs and tribes. Any attempt to bring the country between our settled districts and Burmah under our direct administration even in the least way.. or to govern it as British territory, should be steadily and sternly resisted¹⁵

The district officers, however, could not remain passive when trans-border tribes raided their administrative units or indifferent to murders and many of these just across the border. Self interest and humanitarian reasons prevailed, areas of administrative control grew and the *Inner Line* moved forward. Apparently, the concept was kept flexible. In 1875 it was not so much political as economic considerations that actuated the Government of India to extend these *Regulations* into the Darrang and Lakhimpur frontier.¹⁶ At present it has outgrown its original purpose to curb 'impetuous British officers and to leave tribals undisturbed'. It has

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Foreign Proceedings, Political-A.*, 1872, May, Nos.16-34. Aitchison to the Secretary Government of Bengal, 30 January'; Barpujari, *Problem of the Hill Tribes : North East Frontier*, iii, 10-11 : Chakravarti, P.C. *The evolution of India's Northern Borders*, New Delhi, 1971, 23f.

15. *Ibid.*,

16. *Ibid.*, 117-8.

come to be regarded as the only effective mechanism to protect and preserve tribal identity and culture. Small wonder that in early 1995 when the Home Minister S.B.Chavan indicated Centre's intention to withdraw *Inner Line Regulations* to enable the tribesmen to derive the benefits of the new economic policy, Chief Ministers of hill areas stoutly opposed on the ground that if restriction is withdrawn the entire region would be open to outsiders 'to set-up trade and industrial projects, jeopardising the interest of the sons of the soil and upsetting demographic balance by the influx of foreigners'¹⁷. That the *Inner Line* provides the tribal people a protection regarding the land which is very dear to the tribal people'. Said Nagaland Chief Minister: 'until and unless another safeguard is provided in lieu of ILP we cannot support the move.'¹⁸ 'The need for tribal people is', the Home Minister was told by the Mizos, 'survival as a tribal and development is our secondary issue.'¹⁹

Admittedly, geographical and administrative unification of North-east India or undivided Assam was artificial and not a real one. Historically, linguistically, socially and culturally the hill tracts have no affinity with the people of the plains. It is a historical accident for administrative reasons these areas had been tagged to the province. Under the Government of India Act 1919, administration of tribal areas came under the Governor and outside the purview of the Minister. These areas, known as 'Backward Tract' were excluded even from the operation of the Constitution Act, 1935. The Statutory (Simon) Commission maintained that :

The stage of development reached by the inhabitants of these areas prevents the possibility of applying to them methods of representation adopted elsewhere. They do not ask for self-determination, but for security of land tenure and freedom in the pursuit of their ancestral customs. Their content does not depend so much on rapid political advancement as on experienced and sympathetic handling, and on protection from economic subjugation by their neighbours.

As recommended by the Commission these were divided into two categories viz. *Excluded Areas* : Naga Hills, Lushai Hills, North Cachar Hills and North-East Frontier (Sadiya, Balipara and Lakhimpur) Tracts; *Partially Excluded Areas* : Garo Hills, Mikir Hills and British portion of Khasi-Jaintia Hills²⁰. The former, excluded from the operation from the

17. *The Statesman*, 8 August 1994.

18. Exclusive interview with S.C. Jamir, CM, Naga Hills *The Sentinel*, 14 July 1994.

19. *The Sentinel*, 3 September 1994.

Act, had been administered directly by the Governor and the elected Ministry had no jurisdictions over them, though finance and staff had to be made available from the province. The latter had elected representatives and the Ministry was primarily responsible for the peace and good government.

As a matter of fact the separation of the hill areas from Assam and the formation of a North Eastern Agency comprising hill areas of Assam, Burma and Chittagong may be traced to the Chin-Lushai Conference of 1892. The scheme was deferred on account of 'insuperable difficulties'²¹, particularly intercommunication, but revived on a wider scale by the Government of Assam in its comment on the 'Recommendations' of the Statutory Commission, 12 August 1930. It was suggested that the Centre might 'enquire whether it would not at least be desirable to combine with administration of the 'Backward Tract' in Assam with that of Arracan, Chittagong and Pakokko Hill tracts, the Chin Hills and the area inhabited by the Rangpang Nagas on both sides of the Patkais²². This was based on the notes prepared by J.H. Hutton, DC, Naga Hills and N.E. Parry of Lushai Hills.²³

A definite shape to the proposal was given by Sir Robert N. Reid, Governor of Assam (1939-42), in his *A Note on the Future of the Present Excluded, Partially Excluded and Tribal Areas of Assam*.²⁴ Stressing the differences between the people of the administrative areas of the plains with those in the hills, ethnologically, linguistically and culturally as well as their conflicting interests, Reid considered it absolutely necessary with the introduction of Provincial Autonomy some form of protection until they would stand on their own feet either as an integral part of the province in which they were located or as independent units of the federation as a whole. He was convinced :

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20. *Report of the Indian Statutory Commission*, also known as *Simon Commission*, II, Part iii, Chap 2; Reid, Sir Robert, 'The Excluded Areas of Assam'. *The Geographical Journal*, Jan-Feb 1944, 18f.
 21. *Despatch, Court of Directors, Military*, 24 December 1891.
 22. *ASR., Political (Reform)*, December, Nos. 1-3 RFM 8/8801. August.
 23. *Vide Views of the Local Government on the Recommendation of the Statutory Commission*, 1930, 408-9.
 24. *IOR, L/P and S/12/3115A*, see 'Note'. It is believed at certain quarters that the author of the scheme was no other than Reginald Coupland, Beit Professor of the University of Oxford. He visited India prior to the publication of his notable work, *British Obligation: Future of India* (1944), and had discussions on the subject with officials concerned both in New Delhi and, Shillong.

The inhabitants of the Excluded Areas would not now.. not be ready to join in any constitution in which they would be in danger of coming under the political domination of the Indians... The other Excluded Areas are less... politically minded, but I have no doubt whatever as to their dislike of the idea of being attached to India under a Parliamentary system. Throughout the hills the Indians of the plain is despised for his effeminacy but feared for his cunning. The antipathy to him of the Assam hillman is strictly comparable with that of his cousin the Burmese and merit a serious consideration. The people of the hills of Assam are as eager to work out their own salvation free from Indian domination as are the people of Burma, and for the same reasons.²⁵

Reid was therefore strongly of the opinion that there was no other solution of the tribal problem other than that as advocated by Hutton and Parry, formation of a North-East Province or Agency embracing all the hill tracts from the Lushai (rather Lakher) on the south right round the Balipara Frontier Tract on the north embracing Chittagong hill tracts of Bengal, the Nagas and Chins of Burma as well as the Shan States. He would place the new province under a Chief Commissioner, freed from the control of the Government of India, directly under an appropriate department at Whitehall. In the event of rearrangement of boundaries, Reid was prepared even to sever 'unnatural, alliance of Sylhet and Cachar with Assam' and returning those two districts to Bengal. The remainder might be too small for a Governorship, yet the balance of advance, he was convinced' would be all the other way, 'A new Assam, small but homogenous would be a much happier place than now'; for 'valleyism' would disappear and it would be a 'greater boon.'²⁶

Several meetings were held at Simla in December 1943. It has been held by scholars, in view of 'immense difficulties' geographical, linguistic and financial, the scheme was abandoned²⁷. In reality the problem of tribal areas of Assam continued to be discussed both in New Delhi and Whitehall even after 1942. It appears, Mr Amery, Secretary of State, was well aware that proposals were on anvil for preparation of legislation with the object of declaring, certain Excluded Areas to *Tribal Areas*,²⁸ making them

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, 21-2.

27. Bimal J. Deb and Dilip K. Lahiri, 'North-Eastern province and its viability', *NEIHA*, 1986, 206-7.

thereby the responsibility of the Centre. While awaiting for the considered proposal from the Department of External Affairs, he desired in his despatch on 1 February, 1945 to examine the wider question of future administration of the tribal areas both from political and defence point of view.

Sir Andrew Clow, Governor of Assam (1942-46), in view of uncertainties of the future of the tribal areas and of India, had grave doubts whether it would be possible to frame at that stage a satisfactory plan, and as such he refrained from making any comment on the subject. As to the suggestion that the tribal areas in the south should be brought to the same status as those in the north, it was pointed out that if that were done, the Province of Assam would be 'a long narrow finger, stretching up the Brahmaputra Valley'. Clow preferred a future in which the Tribal Areas and the Excluded areas should be merged into the province of Assam rather than cut off from it and he was at that stage inclined to regard the proposal to convert the Excluded Areas into Tribal Areas as retrograde at any rate south of the Brahmaputra.²⁹

A meeting was held, on the suggestion of the Secretary of State, at the Department of External Affairs on 10 March, 1945 which was attended apart from Olaf Caroe, Secretary External Affairs, J.P. Mills, Adviser to the Governor of Assam, Tribal Affairs, Mc Guire, Scheduled Areas Department, Government of Burma. From the proceedings it is clear that the Burmese government was not in favour of amalgamation. All that they wanted was:

An Agency on the Burma side and one on Indian side under separate forms of administration. The Agency on each side eventually being contemplated as federating with Burma or India, but meanwhile ministerial sphere by cadres which would not be common, but would be under Burma or India in each case, but might be exchangeable.³⁰

It was generally agreed that 'the boundaries would be drawn with regard to ethnography rather than geographically' and these distinct tribes should not be divided between two administrations. The meeting

28. These were beyond the administrative areas of Sadiya and Balipara Frontier Tracts, but within McMahon Line and outside the administrative boundary of the Naga Hills and lying between that district and Burma.

29. *IOR, L/P and S/3115A*; Secret Ext, 5296/44, Whitehall, 1 February 1945; Andrew Clow, *The Future of Tribal People of Assam*, 46-7.

30. *Ibid.*, Secret Record of Informal meeting, 10 March 1945.

also ruled out altogether, as suggested by the Assam Governor, the conversion of Partially Excluded Areas, which had already enjoyed a measure of democratic government and elected members to the legislature, to the status of Tribal Areas.

The colonial scheme of co-ordination or 'Crown Colony' though had its burial with the Transfer of Power in 1947, the kaleidoscopic changes in north-east India in the wake of India's Independence bear ample testimony to the fact that erstwhile tribal experts clearly visualised the complexities of the problem of the tribesmen of North-east and some of their comments and observations were prophetic.

The administration of the *Backward Tracts* was confined to the maintenance of law and order and little thought was given to economic development or welfare of the people. The administrative head of the district was the Deputy Commissioner (D.C.) Neither the D.C. nor his subordinates took much interest in promotion of the welfare activities in their respective areas. Some of the tribesmen had *morungs* or *Bachelor Halls* which served as training centres to impart education on tribal life and warfare, but no organisation for socio-economic development. As a result even Partially Excluded Areas viz. Mikir and Garo Hills, remained backward. Tribal economy continued to be predominantly agricultural conducted largely by *jumming* almost completely lacking in secondary (mining, quarrying, household and manufacturing) and tertiary sectors (trade and commerce). In Garo and Lushai Hills, thanks to the Christian missionaries, progress was made on elementary education. Contact with the plains and the capital of the State being located at Shilong, the Khasis were the most advanced, but the frontier steeped in utter backwardness as they had no contact with the civilized world.³¹

The Constituent Assembly set-up an advisory committee to make recommendations for administrative development of the tribal areas. The latter appointed a sub-committee, the *North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas* also known as the *Bardoloi Committee* after its Chairman Gopinath Bardoloi : other members, Rev, J.J.M. Nichols-Roy, Rupnath Brahma, A.V. Thakkar and Aliba Imti (not a signatory of the report). After visiting tribal areas, the Committee noticed unlike other parts of India where tribals had assimilated to a great extent the life and culture of plainsman, the process of assimilation was minimal in the

31. *Report of the Commission of Hill Areas of Assam (Pataskar Commission) 1965-66.* Ministry of Home, Government of India, 4-16.

interior of the Assam hills, particularly in the Naga and Lushai hills ; that the tribesmen in north-east were very sensitive about their land, forests, system of judiciary and that they should be left free from any fear of exploitation or domination by the advanced section of the people. The Committee recommended in the light of the discussions they had with the hill leaders *Autonomous Districts and Regional Councils* providing adequate safeguards to the tribals in respect of their land, social customs and usages, language and culture.

Opinions were divided among the members of the Constituent Assembly when the amended Schedule was taken up for discussion. Some members opposed the measure on the ground this might lead to a further demand for vivisection of truncated India. Members were warned, 'If you want to keep them separate, they will combine with Tibet, they will unite with Burma, they will never combine with the rest of India'. What the tribesmen wanted, it was opined, 'not separation but adequate safeguards.' On the otherhand, tribal leader Jaipal Singh cautioned the members of the Constituent Assembly to be somewhat charitable in their approach to the tribal problem in north-east India. What set at rest the sensitive issue was the cogent and forceful reasonings of Dr. B.R.Ambedkar in the defence of the *District Councils*. He made it clear that the tribals in Assam hills are different from rest of India inasmuch as the latter were more or less Hinduised and assimilated with the culture and civilisation of those with whom they lived.³² In fact,

the positions of the tribals in Assam was somewhat analogous to the position of the Red Indians in the USA, as against the white immigrants there The United States government felt that their laws, mode of life, their habits and manners of life were so distinct that it would be dangerous to bring them immediately and at one time within the range of laws made by the white people or the whites and white civilisation.³³

On these grounds, Ambedkar added, *District and Regional Councils* should be created in Assam on the lines adopted by the USA for the Red Indians. Under the new constitution the administration of these areas would be carried on by the Governor (not in his discretion) on the advice of the Council of Ministers, while Legislative Assembly and the Union Parliament would have the power to legislate for these areas, with few

32. *Constituent Assembly Debates*, 6 September 1949, ix.27.

33. *Report of the Commission of Hill Areas of Assam*, *op. cit*

exceptions, in all matters. The tribal areas would be represented in the Parliament and State Assembly enabling them thereby to take part in law making process for the country as a whole including areas of their own. This would result in integration not disintegration, an improvement over the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935.

Under the Sixth Schedule an *Autonomous District Council* of not more than twenty-four members, not less than three-fourth, are to be elected on adult suffrage. The *District Council* had been invested with legislative powers to make laws for administration of land, management of forests (other than reserve), to regulate *jhum* (shifting) cultivation, appointment and succession of Chiefs, headman etc. and relating to matters having a bearing on personal and social life of the tribals. The jurisdiction of the State Legislatures extends to the hill districts, though its Act do not apply to an autonomous district. They may be extended with such modification as considered necessary by the *District Council*. The council is empowered to set up various types of courts, including appellate ones, construct and manage primary schools, dispensaries, roads and 'prescribe language and manner in which primary education shall be imparted'. Above all, it possesses power to assess and collect land revenue on the same principle as are generally followed in the States and to levy and collect certain taxes for which it can frame regulations. In accordance with these provisions, in 1952 five *District Councils* were set up for Garo Hills, United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Lushai Hills and the United Mikir (Karbi) and N.C. Hills.

The Bardoloi Committee also recommended the establishment of *Regional Councils* if there were distinct sub-tribes within autonomous district. Immediate constitution of *District Councils* in all Hill States, it was felt, would be a question of time. Pending establishment of district councils five *Tribal Advisory Committees* were set-up in all Hill States, except one, to enable the tribal representatives to associate themselves with administration of their respective areas.

Thus, while the tribals in other States were governed by the Fifth Schedule, the tribesmen of Assam hill tracts had been accorded autonomous status under the Sixth Schedule. Unlike *Panchayats* in other parts of India, the *District Council* had parallel legislative powers with the State government in respect of certain subjects. Not only they had separate judiciary, except the High and Supreme Court, but separate budgets prepared in general budget of the State, though the income of the council stood at a small percentage of the budgeted expenditure and the balance

had to be borne by the Centre and the State government. Special grants apart, tribals enjoyed exemption from payment of income-taxes, reservation of services and special facilities for students and in matters of admission into educational institutions, scholarships and stipends.

Privileges and liberalism notwithstanding, complaints were often made of discrimination and negligence of the government of alleged treatment of tribals as second class citizens. That the development of the hill areas was subordinated to that of the plains and funds earmarked for the hill areas were utilised for benefit of the plains and even Central grant under Article 275 were often utilised for purposes other than intended. The allegations were found to be without any substance by the *Pataskar Commission* in 1966. Over a period of twelve years (1951-62), the Commission has recorded the per capita contribution to the State revenue had been more than double, that of the hills remained more or less the same. Per capita expenditure of the hill districts, which stepped up several times during same period, was more than the plains. As a result the rate of progress in all the fields had been faster in the hills than in the plains. Thus the net area sown per head recorded an increase from 0.15 hectares in 1950-51 to 0.19 in the hills whereas it declined from 9.25 to 0.13 hectares in the plains. During 1950-51 to 1963-64 the number of hospitals rose in hills from 45 to 163, plains 397 to 670, in 1951 the percentage of literacy in hills was 16.29 and it rose to 28.36 in 1961. The corresponding figures in plains were 18.49 and 27.23.³⁴ Evidently 'the State government had treated the hill districts fairly in respect of development within the resources available to them'. In spite of the progress made, geography of the lands, difficult terrain, lack of communication, shortage of labour and material had retarded a faster rate of development to the satisfaction of the tribesmen.

In a rapidly changing world tribals cannot live in their secluded hills, all the more their basic problem is economic development which is not possible in isolation. In fact,

the hill districts are a 'series of economic islands' joined only by the plains. The prospect of both will depend largely on interchange, as in all major economic problems the two regions are interdependent. The hills are dependent on the plains for food, which the latter cannot produce unless the growing intensity of soil erosion is controlled by

34. *Ibid.*, Chap. IV; Rao, V.Venkata, *A Century of Tribal Politics in North East India, 1874-1974.*, 84 ; Datta Ray, B., 'Operation and Implementation of the Sixth Schedule, North-Eastern India', *NEIHA*, 1982 ; 229f.

suitable measures in the hills and there is an integrated problem of irrigation and flood control.. In the development of water-power and industries, too, the two regions have to work together.. the hills will have to depend on the plains for any useful communication programme.. the development programmes of the two regions have necessarily to be integrated.³⁵

Distrust and suspicion bred by long neglect and isolation in the past had rendered difficult integration of the people of the hills and those of the plains. The *Eastern India Tribal Union* (EITU) under Williamson Sangma, Chief Executive Member Garo Hills, made the demand for the creation of a separate Hill State. In his memorial to the S.R.C. following the Tura Conference in October 1954 Sangma made it clear that there had been no political, social, cultural and emotional ties between the people of the plains and those of the hills. To the memorialist, the attitude of the people of the plains was one of 'contempt and subtle hostility'. Apart from endeavours that had been made by the Assamese to impose their language and culture on the hillmen, they were trying to dominate the hills. That the Assamese who were only 56 percent of the total population, control 75 per cent of the seats in the Legislature, 90 percent of the Cabinet and 75 percent of the public services. Practically all the major development works and all the major technical and non-technical institutions were located in the Brahmaputra Valley. Therefore, he pleaded for a separate Hill State for all the hill areas of Assam with an area of 27, 599 sq. miles and a population of 11, 71, 098.³⁶

The demand for the Hill State was not unanimous. The United Mikir and North Cachar Hills stood against a separate Hill State. The National Councils of the Garos and the Mikirs (Karbis) demanded maximum autonomy possible in their respective States. Nichols-Roy, a member of the Assam Cabinet, in a secret memorandum clarified : 'I give my moral support to this demand for a Hill State ... on condition that none will speak in any way as to cause feeling of hatred and enmity against our Assamese brethren and that unnecessary, unpleasant and unreasonable expressions should not be uttered against the Government of Assam which might create unrest.' He opposed the very move for a separate State as it would be economically not viable and do away with the *District Council* and shifting of the capital to the plains which would seriously affect the economy of the tribals. To protect the interests of the tribesmen, he wanted

35. *Ibid.*, 31-2

36. Rao, V.V., *op. cit.*, 182-84.

to have a Hill Ministry in each *Autonomous District* having a Minister or Deputy Minister in the Council of Ministers in Assam to be appointed by the Governor in his discretion. For administration of common subjects the Governor as the Agent to the Governor-General should form a part of the Assam Cabinet.³⁷

There had been a change, in the meanwhile, in the leadership of the Congress Legislative Party. Liberal-minded B.P. Chaliha replaced Bishnuram Medhi, supposed to be a die-hard Assamese. Not only Chaliha inducted a Mizo, Lalmawia into the Ministry, but made a garo Williamson Sangma, Minister for Tribal Areas Department with Cabinet rank. This was followed by the introduction of the *Tribal Affairs Advisory Council* for improvement of the relationship with the tribals and abandonment of the idea of forming a separate State. That Williamson Sangma was sincerely desirous of preventing an agitation for Hill State was obvious when he wrote to the Chief Minister : 'The decision of the Government to creation of a new State of Nagaland is bound to lead to far reaching repercussions in other hill districts unless the amendment of the Sixth Schedule as recommended by the Advisory Council can be taken up at a very early date'.³⁸ The situation however took a new turn with the introduction of the Official Language Bill, 1960, as will be seen in the succeeding pages.

37. *Ibid.*, 339.

38. *Ibid.*, 346-51.

The Reorganisation of Assam

The Assamese believed, like many others, that the divide and rule policy of the colonial rulers segregated the people of the hills from those of the plains. The departure of the British afforded them the opportunity to come closer and maintain the integrity and unity of the State as was existing under the former government. This had become all the more necessary to counteract the move of 'Greater Bengal' then launched by a segment of the elite from the neighbouring State*. A chauvinistic section of the Assamese went further and sought to hasten the process of 'Assamisation' or extention of Assamese influence in the neighbouring hills.¹ They could make no distinction between integration and assimilation⁺ and here lies the tragedy - the fragmentation of Assam. Constant harping of assimilation and 'Greater Assam' alarmed the unsophisticated hillmen of losing their culture, language and even their main prop namely land. The Khasis and the Garos who fought jointly with the Assamese leadership against the Cabinet Mission plan of grouping², gradually developed a lurking fear of being exploited and outnumbered by their neighbours in

* Humayan Kabir wrote in *India*, a paper edited by himself, in 1944 : 'one can easily visualise a Bengali State comprising about 100 million people and living in a compact area. Such a State would include the present State of Bengal and some the outlying districts of Assam and Bihar; in fact the entire province of Assam may be wholly incorporated in it.' Cited in Barua, K.C. *Critical Days of Assam*, 97.

1. Rai Chaudhury, Ambikagiri, ed. *Deka Asom*, III, No. 3, 1937; Hazarika, A.C. ed. *Sahitya Sabha Bhansanavali*, iii 1937, 237-41; iv. 1973, 273 ; Sharma, Manorama, 'Assamese Middle Class and Integration ; The Rôle of *Asom Sahitya Sabha*', *NEIHA*, 1988, 430f ; *The Shillong Times*, 29 August and 19 October 1947.

+. 'Assimilation' as. V. Venkata Rao maintains, 'being based on the principle of *matsyanyaya* (big fish swallowing the small) would mean total loss of cultural life and identity of the group that is being assimilated and its absorption into the dominant group in latter's term.' This would lead to 'antagonism, tension and increasing alienation of each other' ; Rao, V.V.' *A Century of Tribal Politics in North-East India*, 546.

2. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy of Shillong, Gatphoh of Jowai and J. Marak of Tura joined hands with Gopinath Bardoloi against the Cabinet Mission plan of grouping for fear of being swamped by the Muslims of undivided Bengal.

the plains^{2a}. The dearth of technical and trained personnel, it is true, rendered it necessary to appoint non-tribals to implement successive plans and the tribesmen saw before their own eyes outsiders (*dykhai*) were occupying key-posts in the field and in the Secretariat. Allegations were made of Ministers and their underlings of injudicious acts of deforestation and settlement of non-tribals (naming after Ministers) in municipal areas of Shillong which wounded the sentiment of the Khasis as the erosion of their constitutional right.³ The introduction of the Assamese as the official language in the State had opened the breach with the tribesmen on the apprehension of being swamped and losing their cultural identity. The tribesmen had every reason to resent the statement of Nilmoni Phukan, ex-MLA, when he announced :

All the languages of different communities and their culture will be absorbed in Assamese culture. I speak with rather authority in this matter regarding the mind of our people that this State government cannot nourish any other language in the province. When all State affairs will be conducted in Assamese, it will stand in good stead for hill people to transact their business in Assamese with their Assamese brethren.⁴

Even the liberal-minded Rev. B.M.Pugh was constrained to remark :

The Assamese community raked up a storm all over the hill areas where Assamese is not the mother tongue. If the Assamese community had not forced the pace of learning Assamese, the hill people would have been forced to learn it in course of time as it was difficult for

2a. In the debates of the Constituent Assembly, on the provision of the Sixth Schedule, said Nichols-Roy: 'When I speak in the House, I speak with a knowledge of the hill tribes. The people of the hill areas are afraid of exploitation by the plains.' *The Constituent Assembly Debates*, XI, 711.

3. Rymbai, R.T. 'Social and Political tension in North East India' in Bhattacharjee, J.B., ed. *Social Tension in North-East India*, 53f. Two localities, 'Motinagar' and 'Bishnupur', were named after Ministers of the same name. These were allotted, according to official version, in small plots to government servants for dearth of accommodation and located outside autonomous district area and 'not an inch of land belonged to tribals was utilized', Rao, V.V. *op. cit.* 351.

4. *Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, 1948, 581-2.

them to live in the same State without knowing the language of the majority of the people.⁵

While Gopinath Bardoloi and his compatriots sought to maintain the unity and integrity of the State through the common vehicle of thought, namely Assamese language, the hill leaders construed it as a ploy of their counterpart in the plains to dominate the people of the hills. It afforded Williamson Sangma and others the much-desired pretext to renew their agitation for the Hill State. Said the hill leader ;

The people speaking the Assamese language are determined to do away with the language and culture of those who do not belong to the Assamese speaking community. If this attitude continues, there will be no other alternative for hill people but to go out for a separate Part A-Hill State which will enable them to preserve their racial identity, culture and language.⁶

The question arises, if the colonial rulers managed to rule Assam as a single composite State, there is no reason of a reversal of the process on their departure - all the more, adequate safeguards had been provided under the Sixth Schedule which vested them with legislative powers which was denied to them by the alien government. The Official Language Act (XXIII, 1960) declared Assamese official language in Assam Valley districts and Bengali in Cachar while languages of the hills to be decided by the District Councils. Provision was also made for learning Assamese in some schools in hill areas while similar provisions had been made for learning of the tribal language in plains districts. In its amendment in 1961, it was categorically stated that 'there is no intention to make the knowledge of Assamese Compulsory for recruitment to 'state services'.* The crux of the problem was - the hill leaders could foresee that there would be no future for them as long as they remain a minority in their own State. Rustomji rightly remarks :

During the British rule the Governor did not in fact govern. Even in Partially Excluded Areas while it was open to the ministers to offer

5. Quoted in Shekhar Gupta, *Assam : Valley Divided*, 76 : Protests were similarly made by the Mizo Union Executive Committee when it declared : 'If the intention of teaching in Assamese language in the hill districts was to bring hills and plain people to a closer understanding, the committee felt, the languages of the hills should be taught in Assam schools. So long this reciprocity is absent, the resolution added, the Mizo people cannot but conclude that sole aim is to influence and dominate the hill people through Assamese language. *The Statesman*, 12 February 1954.

6. *The Hindustan Standard*, 23 June 1954.

* *Infra*, 166.

advice, the final decision lay with the Governor who knew his right and was not afraid of exercising them. The hill tribe did not in fact feel for constitutional protection; he had complete and unqualified confidence in Governor and knew he was in safe hands. Although the new constitution also vested the Governor with discretionary powers, there were few Governors of the stature and strength to exercise such powers against the will of the ministers - ultimate authority lay not with the Governor but with the elected ministers and that as long as tribals remained with Assam their destiny lay in the hands of the Assamese.⁷

The Language Act (1960) hastened the formation of *All People Hill Leader's Conference* (APHLC) which submitted a memorandum to the President on 21 August 1960, urging him therein the separation of hill districts from Assam. A delegation led by Williamson Sangma, met the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in November and pressed for the creation of an Eastern Frontier State to satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the tribal people.⁸ Nehru made it clear that Assamese would not be imposed on non-Assamese; that knowledge of Assamese was not necessary for recruitment to Assam Civil Service nor in the Secretariat; that in the Legislative Assembly apart from Assamese, Bengali, English and Hindi need be used. He had assured the hill leaders an administrative set-up, the Scottish pattern, which would 'allow the fullest to develop and advance according to the genius of the people maintaining at the same time integrity of the State of Assam'.. This was turned down by the hill leaders on the ground that it envisaged a State within the State and provided only partial administration which 'would increase rather than decrease the constant friction between the hills and plains people'. The various recommendations subsequently made by the *Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam*, commonly known as the *Pataskar Commission*, were also not acceptable to tribal leaders as they fell far short of full autonomy outlined by the late Prime Minister.

Scholar-cum-administrator Nari Rustomji deploras : 'Neither the Government of India nor the Government of Assam were prepared to give their agreement to the hill people's demand for a separate State until they were finally coerced by a series of agitations that brought the administration

7. Rustomji, Nari, *Imperilled Frontiers*, 82.

8. Bhat, Sudhakar, *The Challenge of the North-East*, 69.

virtually to a standstill.⁹ Rustomji failed to realise that Nehru's objective was reorganisation of administration not of the State which would lead to the disintegration of Assam. This had actually happened soon after his departure from the scene. The Assamese accepted the inevitable with a feeling 'even brothers in a family separate, so let us have separation in good grace instead of being forced to it'. Meghalaya was formally inaugurated on January 21, 1972.

Exclusive in spirit, independent in bearing, the virile Nagas demanded not Statehood, but sovereignty of Nagaland. The *Naga National Council* (NNC) which had developed by early 1946 as the political forum of the Nagas declared : 'Nagaland was never conquered by India. The British conquered a part of Naga Hills and once British left India it should revert to its original free status'.¹⁰ Though a section of the NNC favoured continuation of Nagaland as an integral part of India, the extremists wanted complete independence. Under the 'Nine Point Agreement', June 1947, Sir Akbar Hydari, Governor of Assam, effected a compromise with the NNC, under which the Council was vested with increased administrative 'authority', but the hurdle arose over the clause 9 'whether they require the above agreement to be extended or a new one regarding the future of the Naga people to be arrived at'.¹¹ To the NNC the new agreement implied the right of self-determination or complete independence whereas the official version was certain administrative arrangements. The extremists under A.Z. Phizo threw the agreement to winds and declared independence on 14 August 1947.¹² Nehru asserted : 'it is impossible to consider even for a moment such a demand for independence', for this would be attack on the integrity of India.¹³ The several peace missions, one under Gandhian Jayprakash Narayan, ended in failure to arrive at a settlement

9. Rustomji, *op. cit.*, 182.

10. Alemchiba, M., *A Breif Historical Account of Nagaland*, Kohima, 1970, 179. In 1936, the Statutory Commission was told by the Nagas that if British were to withdraw, the natural and logical conclusion was that *status quo ante* should be restored to the Nagas and Nagars left free to manage their own affairs.

11. Phizo admitted : 'This (Clause 9) is not a clear promise of self-government, it was an acceptable start'. But on that very evening Akbar Hydari is said to have warned several Naga delegates 'if Naga Hills district in fact refused to join the Indian Union, India would use force against them.' This turned Phizo into a rebel. Nibedon, Nirmal. *The Night of the Guerrillas*, New Delhi, 1978, 31.

12. Alemchiba, *op cit.*, 179. Phizo is reported to have assisted the Japanese in their onward advance by supplying intelligence of the Naga country on condition that after defeat of the Allies the Nagas would be allowed complete independence as a sovereign State.

13. *Ibid.*, 174.

as the Nagas under Phizo were not prepared to accept one falling short of independence. Despite hostile criticisms, Nehru's government was prepared to grant full-fledged Statehood to the Nagas, but could not concede the demand of complete independence as it would be a reversal of the process of unity and integration of the country.

Stubborn in the assertion of their rights Phizo and his followers went underground and took to the cult of violence. Intimidation, kidnapping, killing of officials became the order of the day. All those who opposed or proposed peaceful approach were liquidated. Intensification of terrorism following the establishment of Nagaland Federal Government forced the government to declare Naga Hills district a 'Disturbed Area' and the district was placed under the control of the Indian Armed Forces (IFC). Phizo flew to London in search of aid.¹⁴ The successful operations of the IFC and the general desire for peace led the moderate *Naga Peoples Convention* (NPC) to negotiate for a settlement which resulted in the creation Nagaland as a separate State in 1960.¹⁵ The altered situation and massive urge for peace left no alternative for the under-ground but to sign the Shillong Accord, 11 November 1975, renouncing the demand and accepting Nagaland as an integral part of India.*

Situated in isolation and in a state of utter neglect the Mizos (Lushais) in the south also felt that their land had never been a part of India. Administered as an 'Excluded Area' by an all-powerful Superintendent with a number of puppet Chieftains they had representation neither in the Central nor Provincial Legislatures. An arrangement of this nature could hardly satisfy the emerging Mizo elite who voiced their feelings from time to time through the *Mizo Union*. Under the Sixth Schedule an autonomous status was conferred on the district. The immediate task of the Union, which bagged all the seats but one in the *District Council*, was to abolish the Chieftainship which had become an anachronism. This was followed by the emergence of the *Mizo National Union* with a national outlook to make the demand for a Union territory; for the Mizo leadership was greatly dissatisfied with the proceedings of the Assam government. The official language issue, slow progress of development and particularly the ineffective, though not indifferent, measures to combat the famine of 1959 opened the breach between the

14. Gundevia, Y.D. *War and Peace in Nagaland*, New Delhi, 1975, Ch. V.

15. *Ibid.*, 190; *Appendix 11*, 223f.

* *Infra*, 111.

Union and the Assam government and brought into the forefront *Mizo National Front* (MNF), an extremist element in Mizo politics.¹⁶

Laldenga, The MNF Chief, invoking the right of self-determination demanded a sovereign independent State of Mizoram. Despite opposition of the *Mizo Union*, the leadership matured plans for an insurrection on a large scale carrying on anti-Indian propaganda, collecting funds and recruiting volunteers. On 28 February 1966, the insurgents made simultaneous attack on Aizawl and Lunglei and set-up a parallel government with an army of its own. The MNF went underground when Indian Armed Forces moved into the hills. Branded as hostiles by the army, who could make no distinction between a loyal and rebel, the Mizos were subjected to arrest, interrogation, incarceration and firing while kidnaping, brutal massacres 'anvil and hammers' compelling many to flee to Manipur, Cachar and Khasi Hills. The MNF found the rulers of neighbouring Pakistan their host that trained the rebels besides supplying arms and ammunitions. Laldenga is reported to have been assured of military aid from China which gave him, 'at best' as Nibedon remarks 'a psychological boost'. Unfortunately for the MNF Chief a section of the leadership having seen the writings on the wall desired peace and return of normalcy. Disappointed in his not having adequate foreign aid and deserted by his own followers, Laldenga had no option but to make overtures for a settlement. The negotiations with occasional breaks resulted in signing of a 'Memorandum of Settlement' in June 1986, setting up Mizoram as a full-fledged State under the Union.¹⁷

Arunachal Pradesh, formerly North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), was an integral part of Assam. Under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, [para 18(2)] ; the administration was the direct responsibility of the President acting through the Agent, Governor of Assam. The people of Assam had the apprehension if NEFA remained under the control of the Centre, a favourable climate would never be created for its ultimate integration to Assam. 'New Delhi would create vested interests for itself and would not readily surrender the patronage in appointment, contracts

16. For further study see Nibedon, *Mizoram : The Dagger Brigade*, New Delhi 1980; Goswami, B.B., *The Mizo Unrest : A Study of Politism of Culture*, Jaipur, 1979; Hluna, J.L. 'Mizo Problem leading to Insurgency', *NEIHA*, 1985, 442f.

17. Sarin, V.I.K. *India's North-East in Flames*, New Delhi, 1980 ; Hluna, J.L., 'Mizo National Front : 'The Role of Foreign Powers in their freedom Struggle' ; *NEIHA*, 1991, 437.

and other fields.' In the absence of inter-communication the plainsmen could not come in contact with the tribes in the north who had affinities linguistically and culturally with the Tibetans in the north. Nonetheless the tribes in the south and in foot hills had intimate relations with Assamese in the plains. They speak Assamese and some of them, those in the Tirap frontier, are disciples of the Vaisnavite heads of Majuli, in the district of Sibsagar. Akbar Hydari, the Governor of Assam, strongly advocated the integration of NEFA and a beginning was made to that end by the induction of Assamese even in the key-posts. There had been a reversal of the gear in Assamisation following the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950. For security reasons, New Delhi tightened its grip over NEFA so as to meet any emergency in that quarter. Stress was laid on the recruitment of officers - All India Frontier Service - 'physically strong and temperamentally suited' for the exacting services of the sensitive frontier. In 1971, NEFA re-christened as Arunachal Pradesh, was separated from Assam and converted into a Union territory under a Chief Commissioner with headquarters at Itanagar.¹⁸ The process of Assamisation, if any, came to a halt with the arrival of noted Anthropologist Verrier Elwin as the Adviser Tribal Affairs who pinned his faith not on 'acculturation' but development of tribesmen according to their own genius*.

Said Nari Rustomji : 'It was Assamese chauvinism that diminished Assam, and lost her tribal population; that 'shrewd', 'narrow-minded (and) parochially Assamese' Bishnuram Medhi wanted to have integration of the hills with the plains immediately 'with force if necessary' which alienated the tribesmen.'¹⁹ Admittedly, the hurried manner in which the diehards sought to extend the influence of the Assamese over the hill areas led to the estrangement of feelings between the two peoples. Rustomji was however oblivious of the fact that the hillmen were subjugated and kept under control by colonial rulers at the point of bayonet and the moment that control was over, most of them wanted to be free from domination, in any case of their neighbours in the plains. Medhi's endeavour to integrate the tribals was strictly in conformity with the principle of

18. Das, G.C. 'Nehru-Elwin Policy of Tribal development : Genesis, Growth and Renunciation'. *NEIHA*, 1993, 285f.

* 'On the advice of Dr Verrier Elwin a policy was pursued that to maintain their cultural identity the tribal people be kept isolated. The result was that there was never emotional integration in the north-east region' D.C. Goswami, *Lok Sabha Debate*, 15 December, 1971.

19. Rustomji, *op. cit.*, 36.

security, integrity and stability emphasised by the Union government; he felt any weakness in this regard would lead to disintegration. Nehru had also the same apprehension when he turned down Naga's demand for independence. The Chinese advance and threatening attitude of Pakistan forced on the Prime Minister to give way and even to evade this issue. Assam Chief Minister was told 'when a limb had become gangrenous, for God's sake cut it off at once before the whole body is infected. Can't you see you'll be doing yourself more harm than good by trying to cling on to the Nagas.'²⁰ There can be no rebuttal-the process of fragmentation thus begun continued without any break till our own times.

There had emerged under provisions of the *Assam Reorganisation and the North-Eastern Area (Reorganisation) Act 1971* seven states : Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and two Union territories, now states, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. It was no small compliment to the policy-makers in New Delhi that they realised the creation of small unviable States will render it difficult to undertake planned programme of development for the North-east region. Blessed by Ms Indira Gandhi the *North-Eastern Council (NEC)* was created in 1972 to co-ordinate and speed up development activities of the entire region. Principal objective of the NEC was the formulation of a united regional and co-ordinated planning, fixation of priorities of projects and schemes, allocation of funds, review and co-ordinating the implementation of projects. Inaugurating the Council on 7 November 1972, the Prime Minister had said : 'the primary purpose of this Council is the development of the region for greater human welfare I am glad to inaugurate this Council which is promising innovation in regional planning. May it fulfil the hope we have invested in it.'²¹ The Council did not find favour with the constituents except Meghalaya where the headquarters is located. There was a feeling it 'will curtail the autonomy of the State', 'will not be able to achieve the objectives for which it has been brought about', 'will be another exercise in futility.' That in spite of its existence of ever two decades, the NEC has belied in its expectations.²²

The NEC is not entirely barren in its results. It has successfully executed power projects, inter-State roads, bridges, technical and

20. *Ibid.*

21. *North-East Council : A Decade of Service*, North-East Council Secretariat, Shillong 1982 ; Singh, B.P. *The Problem of Change*, 111-18.

22. 'NEC Performance', *Vox populi, The Sentinel*, 18 November, 1995; 'A Boon or Ban', 16 November 1995.

professional institutions. Apart from 'excessive bureaucratisation', meagre allocation of funds, insurgency in the region and lack of co-ordination between constituent States rendered difficult for the NEC to deliver goods as was expected. In its meeting in New Delhi, November 1995, S.B. Chavan, Union Minister Home, reminded the Chief Ministers to play an important rôle in the new economic environment, but they were reluctant to do anything with the *Inner Line* which is against the very concept of balanced regional development²³. Suggestions had been made that either the Union Home Minister or the Deputy Chairman Planning Commission should be its Chairman instead of one of the Governors of the constituent States or that the Council Secretariat should be upgraded to a full-fledged department directly under the Prime Minister. All that NEC needs at present is proper utilization of the resources which demands a Central independent authority to speed up and monitor the implementation of the development schemes indispensably necessary to provide employment to the youths who would otherwise swell the rank of insurgents and secessionists.

Financial considerations have always been considered as essential to any scheme of redistribution or reorganisation of States. A State should have adequate financial resources to maintain itself and to develop its economy. Under the British, hill areas were not assets but liabilities; these had to be maintained for reasons political and strategic at the expense of the Indian tax-payers. Most of these States now enjoy special status for financial allocation, yet they are in red. There has been a 'tendency to multiply administrative units and staff disproportionate to requirements and to be overly generous in the provisions of facilities and allowances ... there has also been a tendency ... to inflate the size of ministry and appoint other legislators to offices of profit, a practice not unknown outside the region'²⁴. What is worse there has not been any economic development in terms of the money spent in successive plans. Pumping enormous amounts alone cannot bring in changes in socio-economic conditions in any part of the country, there must be fiscal discipline as well as accountability. Even the Chief Secretary Meghalaya, Nari Rustomji was constrained to remark :

As money came easily, it was spent without the least concern for the benefits to be gained. Blatant deception came to be accepted as

23. *The Statesman*, 22 December 1995.

24. Cited in Verghese, *India's North-east Resurgent*, 231.

standard practice and it was considered smart...to wrest funds under false pretences from the Central Government which had not adequate machinery to check on their effective utilisation.^{24a}

While in Nagaland, writes Kuldip Nayar,

nearly 80 percent of the money that comes from the Centre for development goes to the pockets of the Ministers, officials and their hangers-on. Every head of the department gives the underground their 'share' before he distributes salary among the employees. There is hardly any shop or office in Kohima that resists extortion.²⁵

As to actual development:

There has been no progress worth the name, roads hardly exist; no government school has come up; no professional college nor any hospital. The Nagaland University in the process of taking shape, reeks with corruption.

Allegations had been made of tribal youths obtain order through contact with high places and sold them to outsiders at a premium. 'The entire region,' in the words a political observer,

is full of contractors who literally reek ill-gotten gains. The Ministers' affluences comes from kickbacks on contracts awarded to them by dubious means. The massive Central assistance instead of developing the areas down the bottomless pit of North-east India contractor's ridden economy.... The flourishing markets of smuggled goods thriving in Imphal and Aizawl are inevitable byproducts of region's all pervading corruption.²⁶

The *National Socialist Council of Nagaland* (NSCN) had rightly traced the roots of existing evils to the enormous influx of Indian capital and 'concentration of capital in a few hands' which had set the motion of 'tremendous swing of exploitation of the Nagas by the Nagas and Indian

24a. Rustomji, *op. cit.*, 85-6.

25. Nayar, 'Between the Lines : The Cult of Gun in Nagaland' : *The Statesman*, 18 October, 1995.

26. *India Today*, 16-29 February 1980; Said Zoramthanga, leader of opposition : 'Poor Mizo people getting poorer and poorer while Ministers are getting rich through open bribery by contractors from Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Calcutta, who have cornered all government contracts...who had an access to the Chief Minister who would entertain them even at midnight.' *The Sentinel*, news Item, 25 October 1995.

parasites'²⁷ creating a rich privileged class *Nouveau riche*, politicians, contractors, bureaucrats, police officers. This had undermined the moral fabric of tribal society and created haves and have-nots. 'It may not be very long', as has been warned by B.P. Singh, 'the large body of the people get disenchanted with the mere shell or their desparate political status. The problem emnating from this perception might lead to further trouble and threaten the prospects of progress in the region such as insurgency did in the first three decades since Independence. There is thus an imperative requirement to have a fresh look at the policies as well as the instruments of their implementation'.^{27a}

The inter-State boundary disputes plagued the relations between the parent and newly-born States. Normally the boundary of these States should be the same as it stood on the date of separation or in conformity with relevant Notification on the subject. This was respected more by the breach than observance. As early as November 1862. Abor-Assam boundary was delimited 'at the foot of the hills.'²⁸ On the recommendation of the State Reorganisation or Bardoloi Committee appointed by the Constituent Assembly under Notification of 1951 plains portion of the erstwhile Excluded Areas, were transferred to Assam to be administered under normal laws and regulations. Arunachal not only claimed but allegedly encroached large chunks of Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur and Sonitpur districts setting up villages, roads, *bazars* and border posts and in 1992 there were even border clashes.²⁹ Arunachal government refused to accept the aforesaid notification on the ground these areas were given up 'without the consent of the local people' and 'appreciating the historical background.' As a matter of fact these areas were inhabited by non-tribals and mixed population and as such allegation of Arunchal did not arise.

Despite several meetings between the Chief Ministers of Assam and Arunachal and between the Union Minister Home and the Chief Ministers encroachment and intimidation of the Assamese in the border areas never ceased. In a meeting in early 1979, Assam was told that unless the border issue was settled to the satisfaction of the people of Arunachal, Assamese

27. Isak Chishi Swu and Th. Muivah, *Manifesto National Socialist Council*, 33-5.

27a. Singh, B.P., *The Problem of Change*, 139.

28. Aitchison, C.U. *Treaties, Engagement, etc.* XII, *vide* agreement entered into by the Meyong and other Abors, 156f.

29. *The Statesman*, editorial, 22 June 1994, 2 July 1995; Bhattacharyya, Bhubaneswar, *The Troubled Border*, 210f. The author deserves thanks for incorporating several invaluable documents in this book not readily accessible to researchers.

living in Arunachal would be insecure and relationship between the Centre and the Arunachalis would deteriorate affecting the unity and integrity of the country.³⁰ In a subsequent meeting, 31 August 1991, when the Arunachal Chief Minister sought an adjustment of 955 sq.km out of 3648 sq kms., Assam Chief Minister expressed his inability to do so on the ground the State Reorganisation Act defined the constitutional boundaries of the two States and therefore it would not be possible for the Government of Assam to change the boundaries or transfer any land without contravening the provisions of the Act.³¹ Nonetheless he was prepared to examine the proposal by officials of the two States 'to narrow down the area of dispute.' Parleys between the two CM's notwithstanding, reports were pouring in of fresh encroachments and intimidations from Sonitpur, Lakhimpur and Tinsukia districts of Assam.

The inter-state boundary between Assam-Meghalaya is also under dispute which has strained the relations between the two States and resulted in creating a sense of insecurity in the minds of the people on either side of the border. *The Joint Officials Committee*, appointed in May 1983, had identified as many as six sectors of differences in boundaries ; (i) Garo Hills and Goalpara district, (ii) Jaintia Hills and Karbi-Anglong districts, (iii) East Khasi Hills and Karbi-Anglong district, (iv) Question of re-transfer of Block I and II of Karbi-Anglong to Meghalaya, (v) boundary between Cachar and Jaintia Hills, (vi) East and West Khasi hills and the districts of Kamrup and Nagaon.³²

The Joint Official Committee found no basic difference in the first three sectors although there were disputes between Mikir (Karbi-Anglong) and Jaintia Hills and it was suggested that these should be demarcated on the ground jointly by the Survey department of the States on the basis of notifications. Claims and counter-claims were however made in sectors iv, v, and vi. In regard to the re-transfer of Block I and II to Meghalaya from Karbi-Anglong, Meghalaya government contended that existing boundary is an unilateral demarcation made by Assam during 1969-70. The Assam government explained that Karbi-Anglong (erstwhile Mikir Hills) Autonomous District was formed in 1950-51 under the Sixth Schedule by taking areas from former districts of Sibsagar, Nagaon and

30. *Ibid.*, 221.

31. *Ibid.*, 254-5.

32. *Ibid.*, 301 f.

Khasi-Jaintia hills, under provisions of the Assam Reorganisation and the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act 1971. Re-transfer of areas to Meghalaya is not within the purview of the State government.

In regard to sector vi boundary between districts of East and West Khasi-Hills and the district of Kamrup and Nagaon, both the governments had agreed to refer the question of interpretation of the boundary between the two States to a committee by the former Chief Justice of India, Y.V. Chandrachud and another member Justice V.S. Despande of Delhi High Court. After hearing counsels of either government the committee in its report 27 July 1987 rejected unequivocally claims of Meghalaya to certain areas in Assam with the remark :

We do not blame the Khasis for the intensity of their sentiments...nor can we blame Assam, for they ask for what the constitution has given them. And, on a true interpretation of the constitution, Assam cannot be accused of asking for a pound of flesh.³³

In May 1992, in a meeting held at Guwahati the Chief Ministers of Assam and Meghalaya agreed (i) to maintain the *status quo* and settle all disputes through mutual discussions, (ii) to list out areas of differences and examine them and make recommendations in a spirit of give and take to the respective government and (iii) to continue joint demarcation in areas not under dispute. Reports were however forthcoming, not unoften of removal of boundary pillars, of encroachments (Patarkuchi, Pilingkata), erection of police pickets, schools, churches within Assam with active help or connivance of the Meghalaya government.³⁴ An early solution of the boundary problem is a *sine qua non* for the security and peace of the border areas between the two neighbouring States.

Assam-Mizoram boundary was laid down along the Cachar-Lushai hills (Notification No.2106 AP dated 9 March 1933) inter-district boundary. This was also the *Inner Line* of the erstwhile Lushai Hills and therein located the *Inner Line Reserve Forest* (ILRF) covering a considerable part of the district of Cachar. During the 'Mautam' famine of 1958 caused by the flowering of the bamboos, purely on humanitarian ground affected Mizo cultivators were given temporary settlement in ILRF subject to the

33. *Ibid.*, 320-1 ; 'A Historical Background' with necessary maps had been furnished by the present writer to the Chandrachud Committee as desired by the Assam government. *Assam, Home Political, D.O. PLA (B.C.) 29/85/176*, Bezbaruah to Barpujari, 26.11.87.

34. Bhattacharyya, Bhubaneswar, *op. cit.*, 332f.

condition of their vacating immediately after the harvest. This was extended by another year on earlier condition and payment of revenues under the Forest Rules. Not only the endeavours subsequently made by the Forest department to evict the encroachers proved a failure, but their numbers steadily on the increase. To make matters worse Mizoram authorities violating inter-State boundaries encroached upon ILRF by construction of roads, offices, schools, rest camps and even irrigation project.³⁵

In a meeting held at Silchar 7 September 1973, DC, Cachar was requested by Aizawl authorities to stay eviction operation in Cachar-Mizoram border in consideration of the food scarcity and famine condition in Mizoram; he was told in reply that at his instance eviction process was suspended in 1972, but it would not be possible to alter the policy of the government for removing the encroachers from ILRF of Cachar. In a subsequent meeting, 21 November, DC, Cachar was reminded by his counterpart at Aizawl the vital issue that there had been no clear demarcation of the boundary on the ground and as such any eviction process against Mizo cultivators would give rise to 'serious repercussions,' endangering the security of the border areas. This was followed by construction of a sales-tax gate-cum office near Lailapur and a highway about 4 km, both within the district of Cachar. The developments in Assam-Mizoram border could not but draw the attention of the Union government. To diffuse the tension the Home Minister had a meeting with two Chief Ministers at New Delhi on 6 February 1994. It was decided that (i) both sides will simultaneously withdraw the security forces from the site, (ii) Mizoram will stop forthwith further construction on the disputed area and (iii) a team from the Survey of India will be deputed to assist the States to establish correct alignment of the boarder on the ground.³⁶

Assam-Nagaland border dispute has been a perennial problem although boundary was defined by 1925 Notification and later specified by the State of Nagaland Act 1962. Nagaland had been demanding transfer to Naga hills the areas hitherto transferred out of it to the adjoining districts. In its memoranda, 10 September 1971 and 9 February 1972, the Nagaland government maintained that 'the Nagas are but asking for return of their own territory, which are illegally taken away from them.' Nari Rustomji would also say ; 'Much of their land bordering the plains

35. *Ibid.*, 367-68.

36. *Vide Minutes of the Meeting, 6 February '94, ibid.* 380-81.

had been constituted as reserve forests and the machinery for forest control had been established in the British times at the headquarters of the plains districts. These forests reserves were also included, for administrative convenience, within the boundary of the plains districts Sibsagar and Nagaon districts of Assam'.³⁷ A perusal of the Ahom chronicles or the *Buranjis* and archival materials of the colonial period will reveal that disputed areas were under effective control of the Ahom and Kachari rulers; even the last Ahom monarch Purandar Singha (1833-38) had his jurisdiction upto the foot of the hills.³⁸

As a matter of fact encroachment on Assam land, destruction of reserve forests, forceful collection of taxes and atrocities have been going on even before the grant of Statehood. In August 1971, a one man Commission was appointed under K.V.K. Sundaram to enquire into the whole issue and to make necessary recommendations. In the meantime *status quo* was to be maintained through the patrolling by the CRPF and BSF. Nagaland government refused to co-operate with the Commission and the report, though remained unpublished, demarcated the foot of the hills as the border between the two States and recommended that a half of a kilometer stretch on either side be declared no man's land.³⁹ While Sundaram was busy in his enquiries, the Nagas committed outrages at Merapani and Chungajan in the district of Golaghat.⁴⁰ In spite of interim agreements 1972 and 1979, under the very nose of the CRPF and the BSF the Nagas destroyed properties and killing defenceless villagers irrespective of age or sex. In 1995 alone, reportedly there had been six incidents of arson, abduction, looting and killings purportedly to create tension among border villagers to encroach the land vacated by the fleeing villagers.

37. Rustomji, *op. cit.*, 36.

38. The validity of the claims made the Nagas was analysed and examined in a note of the present writer to the Sundaram Commission; Ministry of Home Affairs, D.O. No. Adv. (AN) / 72, Sundaram to Barpujari, 19 December 1972.

The Nagaland government had also demanded that all the Nagas in whatever part of North-East India they may be living should be transferred over to Nagaland to satisfy the political aspirations of the Nagas or other Nagas should be unite into one area and form into a State comprising parts of Asaam, Manipur and Tirap frontier in Arunachal Pradesh.

39. Excerpts of the report, 'Summary of Conclusion of Facts' are being reproduced in Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, 44-7.

40. See 'Details of Incidents', *ibid*, 55-76 ; Shekhar Gupta, 'Nagaland' Fight for Control,' *India Today*, 30 June 1985.

The weak-kneed policy of Assam government and dithering of New Delhi emboldened the Nagas to occupy vast areas of reserve forests erecting schools, churches, setting up industries and armed police outposts with the object of achieving 'Greater Nagaland'.⁴¹ Reportedly frustrated villagers had formed a citizens body, the *Simanta Surakshya Samity* demanding immediate steps for a solution of the border problem and had threatened to start a blockade of all roads and disrupt civil supplies to Nagaland.⁴² The tragic events in Assam-Nagaland border amply demonstrate, we are sitting on the edge of a volcano which may erupt from time to time until the policy-makers in New Delhi replace successive interim arrangements with permanent settlement. Unless the Union government asserts its will and authority peace in Assam-Nagaland border will be illusive.

41. The Nagas have illegally occupied and formed the sub-division *Tizit* in the Abhaypur Reserve, Sibsagar district (1984-5), *Newland* in Rengma Reserve (1987) and *Kohoboto* in Diphu Reserve (1991) Karbi-Anglong district. In this district alone reportedly as much as 43,0000 hectares will pass under the control of the Nagas to form another district. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, 88-9 ; *The Sentinel*, 6 February 1995 ; 'Golaghat Sima Samasya', *Dainik Asom*, 4 February, 1995.

42. News Item, *Dainik Asom*, 16 December, 1995, 5 February, 1996.

Migration : Crisis of Identity

The most disturbing development in the twentieth century Assam has been of population explosion. It has increased from 3.3 million in 1901 to 22.3 million in 1991 while India, the country as a whole, from 238.4 million in 1901 to 843.9 million in 1991. Decadal variations in the same period will also exhibit Assam had much higher rate than of Indian average¹ although in natural growth in recent studies² there is no major difference between Assam and all India. Had Assam's population increased at the same rate as that of India from 1901 to 1991, which is 54 per cent, the population of truncated Assam in 1991 would have been 14.9 million, not 22.3 million. The extra 7.4 million are by and large migrants and their descendants.

The process was started with migration of plantation labour to meet the growing demand of the European tea-planters. The Assamese with their limited wants and simple habits loath to work as wage-earners; most of them being agriculturists could work only in off-season. It was difficult to have adequate numbers at seasons when they were greatly needed. The problem became all the more acute during the boom in tea market in 1860s when every planter, big and small, entered into blind competition to push on his cultivation. The planters were advised by the local authorities to procure labour from areas of surplus population : Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Central Province (Madhya Pradesh), United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh) and Madras. Recruited at the place of origin on contract basis, the labourers were expected to return back to their original homes on the

1. Decadal variations since 1951:

1951-61	Assam	+34.98	India	21.8
1961-71	"	+34.95	"	24.6
1971-91	"	+52.44	"	48.2

2. Chakravorti, R. D., 'Economic and Demographic imbalance as factors responsible for insurgency in North-East India,' paper presented at the National Seminar, NEICSSR, Shillong, July, 1995, see Pakem, B.ed. *Insurgency in North-East India*, 240f.

termination of their contracts³. The time-expired labourers however found it convenient to settle near the garden as cultivators and supplement their income by working at times when labour was insufficient specially for plucking and hoeing. In 1891 the total number of these migrants was estimated at 4,23,199 which went up in 1901 to 6,54,000; and on expansion of tea-gardens after two decades a million and half or 30 per cent of the total population. After 1931 importation slowed down which was totally stopped by 1941.⁴

North-East Bengal hitherto formed an integral part of the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa, later Kamata; naturally there had been frequent contact between the peoples of these regions which was borne out by their linguistic and cultural affinities.⁵ The process was accelerated when the Ahom king Siva Singha (1714-44) made Hinduism the State religion and initiated himself by a *Saktist* priest of Nawadwip whom the neophyte king made the chief of the Kamakhya temple, centre of *tantrik* cult in eastern India. Though the commercial treaty which Raja Gaurinath (1780-94) entered into with Captain Welsh in 1793 opened the gateway to merchants of Bengal, it was not until British occupation of Assam in 1826 when avenues of employment in office and trade were opened that inflow of population actually begun from the neighbouring districts of Sylhet, Dacca, Mymensing and Rangpur. The *amlahs* (officers) of Bengal replaced the official aristocracy in Assam when the latter proved themselves inefficient and incapable of discharging their duties under the alien government.⁶ Bengali had to be made the language of the court in place of Persian, for it was found too costly and extremely difficult to have substitutes when a Persian scribe was on leave or left the service.⁷ The services of the new-comers became indispensable in the newly-started government schools to train up Assamese youths to occupy minor jobs

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3. As reported by the Chotanagpur authorities earlier not less than 50,000 returned home. Later, as Gait explains, 'They are far happier whether they continue to work in the garden or settle down to cultivate in independent settlement or combine both occupation than they would be if they abandoned the province to return to their own country'. *ASR.*, File 138 R., Commissioner to the Director General Statistics, 19 May 1886.
 4. *Census 1951* xii, Part-A, 73.
 5. Barpujari, ed., *Political History of Assam*; i, Gauhati, 1975, 75.
 6. *Ibid.*, *Assam; In the Days of the Company*, Gauhati, 1980; 27, 49-50; Sengupta, S.C. 'The Bengalis in Assam in the 19th century', *NEIHA*, 1988, 77.
 7. *Bengal Political Proceedings*, 1830, Nos. 65-6.

under the government. In 1871, the endeavours made by American Missionaries replaced Assamese for Bengali in courts and schools, yet the Bengalis continued to occupy almost all the white-collared jobs which could not but produce irritation and resentment of those who had no other means of livelihood other than the service under the government.⁸

Likewise, arrived the Marwaris or merchants of Rajasthan who had the monopoly of trade, both wholesale and retail. The indigenous people unless forced scarcely resorted to markets for the sale of their surplus produce which was bartered from house to house. 'The enterprise and endurance of the Marwaris is surprising'; formerly they lived whole year round 'in miserable house, sometimes in most unhealthy situations and slowly store what they collect from the hill tribes and country produce for export.' Besides trade, they acted as money-lenders, bankers, *maujadars* and agents of tea-garden managements. In recent times, the enterprising Marwaris have extended their activities to tea, jute, plywood and other industries.⁹

The presence of a large body of Nepalese in the Regiment and the Frontier Police encouraged these migrants to occupy virgin fields to carry on large scale sugarcane cultivation and dairy farming in the districts of Darrang, Lakhimpur and Kamrup. Security reasons prevented their entry into the Frontier Tracts and the hill districts except Khasi-Jaintia Hills. The migrants were facilitated by the Indo-Nepalese Friendship Treaty (1950) and subsequent agreements to have equal rights with Indians to free movement, of employment, agriculture, business and acquisition of properties. As a result Nepali population rose from 1,01,338 in 1951 to 3,49,116 in 1971 showing an increase of 3'5 times while the population of Assam only doubled during the same period.¹⁰

Influx of the migrants notwithstanding, Sir Henry Cotton, Chief Commissioner of Assam, found even at the close of the century over four-fifths of the cultivable waste lands untouched by plough. What the Chief Commissioner wanted was to cover these with food crops, not with tea-bushes, for Assam had to depend on Bengal for food grains.¹¹ The

8. Barpujari, *op. cit. Infra*, 90-1.

9. *Ibid.*, *Comprehensive History of Assam*, 111-12.

10. *Census*, 1931, 49; 1951, 53.; Manirul Hussain, 'Nepalis in Assam and Asamia Nepali question', *Mainstream*, 15 April, 1989, 13-18.

11. *PWD (R.C.) Proceedings*, 1902; October, No. 105; Perum to Secretary Government of India, 18 September.

Assamese, apathetic and indolent, were stationary.¹² Only three per cent of the population belonged to the working class which formed a very strong contrast to densely populated areas of Bihar and United Provinces where the proportion of labouring population to the total was eighteen per cent. The urgent need of the province, he felt, increased labour supply in both the sectors, agricultural and non-agricultural. The hopes of Sir Henry was fulfilled with the completion of Assam-Bengal and Eastern-Bengal Rail Projects which accelerated inflow of migrants from Bengal and Upper Provinces as professionals, traders, artisans, and ordinary labourers. Many of them settled down permanently, but major segment temporary, periodic or semi-permanent.¹³

Of the cultivators, only a few migrants from the neighbouring districts of East Bengal crossed the boundary and settled down in Sylhet and *char* or riverine lands of the districts of Goalpara. The situation altered at the turn of the century. The pressure on the soil, diluvium on their home districts, availability of cheap, plentiful and fertile lands on easy terms in Assam in place of expensive and uncomfortable holdings as sub-tenants in Bengal drove the immigrants, particularly of the district of Mymensing, to move up into the valley and they formed during 1911-21 an appreciable element of population in all the four and lower middle districts.¹⁴ In Golapara they formed 20 per cent of the population and Nagaon 14 per cent. In Darrang they penetrated along the Brahmaputra while in Kamrup parties searching land were found near the Bhutan border. 'Where there is waste land', observes C.S. Mullan, the Census Superintendent (1931),

thither flock the Mymensingias, without fuss, without tumult, without undue trouble to the district revenue staff, a population which must amount to over half a million has transplanted itself from Bengal to Assam Valley during last twenty five years.¹⁵

Mullan feared¹⁶ that 'the outcome of this unbridled immigration would be like wiping out the Assamese race and culture more conclusively than the

12. *Census*, 1891-1901 exhibits variations in population as follows: Goalpara-2.6, Kamrup-7.8, Nagaon-23, Sibsagar + 30.92, Lakhimpur + 46.34. Rise in population in latter two districts was due to immigration of plantation labour.

13. *Census*, 1891, 192; 1901, 34.

14. *Ibid.*, 1921, 40-1.

15. *Ibid.*, 1931, 51.

16. *Ibid.*, 1951, xii Part 1-A, Report. 73.

Burmese invasions hundred years ago'. This was rather exaggerated, but Mullan's prophecy—'Sibsagar would ultimately remain the only district where an Assamese race would find a home of its own'—is also not likely to be fulfilled: the former district of Sibsager has already been 'overrun' by foreigners.^{16a} The immigrants occupied in an organised way waste lands, grazings and forest reserves. 'Their hunger for land was so great', remarks the Census Superintendent (1951), 'that in the eagerness to grasp as much land as they could cultivate, they not infrequently encroached on government reserves and on lands belonging to the local people from which they could be evicted only with great difficulty.'¹⁷ Fearing the possibility of breach of peace, the *Line System*, devised in 1916, was enforced in 1920 in the district of Nagaon and sub-division of Barpeta compelling the migrants to settle in 'segregated localities.'¹⁸ When this was stoutly opposed by the immigrants, a committee was appointed by the government under Chairmanship of F.W. Hockenhull to review the whole situation. While emphasizing the need to develop extensive waste lands, the committee desired retention of the *Line System* for the protection of tribal settlements.¹⁹ The Congress Coalition government apprehending unrestricted occupation might 'drive away the indigenous inhabitants' prohibited settlement to persons who came after 1 January 1938. On the resignation of the Coalition government, Sir Saadullah, who came to power in November 1939, wanted abolition of the *Line System* to encourage settlement of Muslim immigrants to make Assam a permanent base of the Muslim league.²⁰ The Assamese Hindus feared that Assam would be converted into a Muslim immigrant's province. This was confirmed by Saadullah's subsequent instruction to the Census Superintendent that in the *census* of 1941 the population should be classified on the basis of community not religion which had the effect in enumeration of the 'Tribal' instead of 'Hindu' as was done earlier,

16a. 'Where Even Mullan Erred', *The Sentinel*, 15 February 1997.

17. *Ibid.*, 77.

18. Under the *Line System* lands were divided into three categories: those (i) open to immigrants, (ii) close to immigrants, (iii) and where a line was drawn only where they could settle one side of it. The system was partially successful in restricting indiscriminate occupation, but 'mixed' and 'closed settlements' were turned before long immigrant settlements mainly because of insincerity and corrupt practices of the settlement officers.

19. *Further study*, see Guha, Amalendu, *Planter-Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics*, 206-12., 256-63, 281-6.

20. *The Assam Tribune*, 21 August 1941.

resulting obviously reduction in the number of Hindus.²¹ His 'Grow more Food' or 'Land Development Scheme' was turned down by the Viceroy Lord Wavell as a ploy 'to grow more Muslims.'²² Nonetheless in its Resolution at the Lahore session, 1940, the Muslim League openly declared inclusion of Assam in Pakistan along with Muslim majority Bengal. The President M.A. Jinnah told his Private Secretary Moin-ul-Haque Chaudhury, on the eve of Partition, 'wait, I shall present you Assam on a platter.'²³ But for the endeavors made by Gopinath Bardoloi with blessings of Gandhiji, Assam would have been an integral part of East Pakistan.

In 1947, the setting up of the Dominions of India and Pakistan did not prove deterrent to the exodus of the Bengali Muslims into Assam. In spite of Pakistani Passport system, Pakistan (Control) Act, and Migrants Act, 1950, the inflow of migrants remained unabated. As the earlier migrants settled down in districts of Assam bordering East Pakistan the newcomers found no difficulty in crossing the porous border and settled down through the *diwanis and matbars (zamindars)* amongst their relatives unchecked and undetected. The rate of increase of the Muslims in Assam has been estimated during 1951-61 at 27'5 per cent as against the natural increase of 22'4 per cent. At the former rate the number of Muslims in Assam on 1 March 1961 should have been 2,544,818 and so the number of Muslims who came from East Pakistan stood at 220,691 ; of these after

21. *Ibid.*

22. The last nail in the coffin of Saadullah Ministry was driven in December 1940 when Robert Reid, Governor of Assam, ruled out 'grow more food' scheme as there was not enough waste land. Not Saadullah alone, Abdul Matin Chaudhury, ex-MLA, maintained, 'Common sense demands that for the development of the province, settlement of land ought to be facilitated and unrestricted immigration encouraged as a deliberate and definite policy.' Cited in Das, P., '*Asamar Pamua Samasya aru line Pratha*', *Awahan*, XI, 1931, 1201.

The present writer had the privilege of travelling several times (1937-9) by the two reserved bogies, Mairabari-Mymensing, attached to the erstwhile Assam-Bengal Railways to bring fresh land-hungry immigrants from East Bengal to Assam.

23. Cited in Singh, Bhawani, *Politics of Alienation in Assam*, 72. During his visit to Assam in 1945, when Mr Jinnah was questioned by the correspondent, *Hindustan Standard*, how could he include Assam in his projected Pakistan, as the Moslem population formed only 38.6 percent (including Sylhet), the reply was 'I donot want to enter into any controversy on the issue, but I assure you Assam will be in mv Pakistan'; Kakati, S.C. 'Dangers of Undeclared Migration.' *The Assam Tribune*, 10 December 1992, also. ASR. Confidential B, 1964, File C 232/46.

deduction passport holders, numbering 6952, the number of illegal migrants stood at 213, 739.²⁴ In the wake of liberation of Bangladesh several lakhs of refugees came to North-east India, and most of these of course returned but a few lakhs remained and consequently the Muslim population in Assam rose to 24.3 percent in 1971,²⁵ the highest for any State in India except Jammu and Kashmir.

No Chief Minister had championed the cause of Assam and her people so forcefully as did Gopinath Bardoloi. When he was told by Pandit Nehru that Centre's assistance to Assam was contingent upon the assistance it received for the rehabilitation of the refugees, Bardoloi brought home to the Prime Minister that cultivable land in Assam was extremely limited, and whatever was available then absolutely necessary to meet the demands of the landless peasants and also of the victims in floods of the previous two years.²⁶ No popular government worth the name, he asserted, can ignore facts in a State where agriculture is the mainstay of the people without any industrial development principally because of Centre's meagre assistance.²⁷ Union Home Minister, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was also informed by Bardoloi that Assam had already rehabilitated one lakh refugees in addition to one lakh twenty-five thousand earlier.²⁸ The number of Hindu refugees stood at 4,87,000 in 1958 and rose to 6,00,000 in 1961. A fresh exodus started with the outbreak of communal disturbances in 1968. Hindu refugees since Partition totalled 10,68,455 in 1968 and the inflow remained unabated, because of religious persecution, riots and insecurity of life and property. Of these, the majority belonging to Namasudra and Scheduled Caste community settled themselves like their

24. *Census*, 258; As to the actual number of such infiltrators the then Union Minister of Home declared in reply to a question told in the *Rajya Sabha* on 11 March 1970, that the number during 1951-61 on the basis of *census* had been assessed at 2,21,000. *The Statesman*, 12 March, 1970.

25. Shukla, B.P., *What Ail's India's North-East*, New Delhi, 1980.

26. Nehru to Bardoloi, 18 May 1949, cited in Barooah, N.K., *Gopinath Bardoloi, Guwahati*, 1990, 31.

27. *Ibid.*, Bardoloi to Nehru, New Delhi, 29 May, 1949, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was also furious against Bishnuram Medhi, Assam Revenue Minister, when the latter planned allocation of surplus lands in violation of Centre's directives, 50:50 between the local landless and refugees. Defending Medhi Sardar Patel was told by Bardoloi that the Revenue Minister had acted strictly in conformity with Land Acquisition and Requisition Acts passed prior to the question of allotment of land to the refugees. *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Correspondence*, IX, 207-9, 211.

28. *Ibid.*; Bardoloi to Patel, 22 June, 1950, 206-7.

Muslim counterparts as farmers in rural areas while fairly educated Hindu refugees concentrated in cities and towns as shop-keepers, grocers, carpenters, hawkers, barbers, sweet-meat sellers²⁹ etc.

Nehru was well aware that immigrants from over-crowded East Bengal to Assam will continue and the problem was how 'to control and organise these immigration' so that Assamese may not be outnumbered and their culture and language preserved.³⁰ Nehru's government failed to realise that the rehabilitation of the refugees was not a responsibility of Assam alone nor her neighbours—Tripura and West Bengal. An exchange of population in a planned manner would have greatly relieved the burdens of these States and minimised, if not mitigated, much of the sufferings of the ill-fated human beings. When millions of East Pakistani, later Bangladeshi citizens, both Hindus and Muslims, were directly and indirectly forced to take shelter in neighbouring States, India could have rightfully claim for their rehabilitation a chunk of territory from Bangladesh under *The Indira-Mujib Treaty* (1972). Ms. Gandhi told the *Rajya Sabha*, October 1980, that if 'there were any foreigners, they would be settled elsewhere in the country, if the Assamese do not want them.'³¹ No action whatever was taken by her government nor her successors. Rehabilitation of the migrants is a national burden to be equitably shared by all the States of the country.

The influx of the immigrants created a crisis of identity amongst the indigenous Assamese. If the process was allowed to continue, they feared, as in the case of the Tripuris, their economic, political and cultural life would be endangered and their very existence would be at stake. The Assamese found that the migrants had settled in Assam but most of them were averse to identify themselves with the mainstream and consider them as minorities or colonials and not unoften looked upon their counterparts elsewhere for inspiration and guidance. Some of them did not even hesitate at times to do harm to the State to suit their interests. The failure of various sections of migrant population to adapt themselves to the local language, customs and traditions had accentuated the identity crisis. 'A proper socialisation process' as B.P. Singh remarks, 'which alone could have helped to generate understanding among different communities, was

29. *India, 1968*, Publications Division, Government of India, 1958; 1968, 117.

30. Nehru to Medhi, *AICC Files*, No. 97; 1 December 1937; see Guha, *op. cit.*, 257-8.

31. Murty, T. S. *Assam: The Difficult Years*, 36.

frequently impaired in the wake of periodic inter-community clashes and killings and the tendency of each person to continue himself to his own group'.³²

Of the immigrants, the plantation labour live away from the habitation of the Assamese and are engaged in a profession not of interest to the indigenous people. The community poses no problem linguistically and culturally, rather there has been a process of assimilation in between the two communities. They speak in Assamese and in the *census* of 1961 only 2,04,000 are reported to have spoken their tribal language.³³ They send their children to Assamese schools and participate in the Assamese *Bihu* or spring festival. This segment of the population, over thirty lakhs, close to the strength of the Assamese Hindus, has tremendous influence as 'vote bank'. Already they have sixteen representatives in the State Assembly and a substantial share in the Ministry. Under inspiration of Shib Soren, President, *Jharkhand Mukti Morcha*,³⁴ they have been making demands for improving their lot socially and politically. There is every likelihood that at no distant future they will wrest political status similar to granted other ethnic tribes.

The Marwaris constituting a minor segment of the population—sex ratio 360 female for 1000 males— are 'virtual controllers of Assam's economy.' Exclusive in social life, they have their own schools, hospitals, charitable institutions, news papers, but they speak in Assamese, patronise local institutions and donate liberally to political parties. Assamese have neither the aptitude nor the resources for the type of jobs pursued by the Marwaris nor the latter have any inclination to enter into competition with white-collar jobs which attracts mostly Assamese youths. Of late, insecurity of life and property has compelled some of these business magnates to

32. Singh, B.P., *Problem of Change*, 162.

33. *Census, 1961, Part II A., 32-7; Report of the Commissioner Linguistics Minorities, 4th Report, Ministry of Home, Government of India, 1962, 18-9.* Since 1931, when linguistic tabulation was recorded, tea garden labourers like the immigrant Muslims recorded Assamese as the mother tongue. It is not unlikely as the Census Superintendent (1961) refers 'that some among the persons, who have returned their mother tongue as Assamese have done so from devious motive... nonetheless there had been genuine increase in the number of people speaking Assamese with the introduction of more schools in tea garden areas in the Assam Valley where the medium of instruction is naturally Assamese.'

34. *The Sunday Statesman, Miscellany, 11 August 1985,*

transfer their capital outside the State leaving a skeleton staff in their establishments in Assam.³⁵

The settlement of the Nepalese would not be a problem at all but for the tenacity with which they held their language, culture, usages although they are in Assam for generations. Intermarriage with the Nepalese is a rarity and they never fail to refer Nepal as their mother country.³⁶ The case is however otherwise with the earlier migrants who assimilated themselves with the Assamese mainstream. They joined hands with them in opposing Pakistan's demand and sought incorporation of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts of West Bengal, inhabited by a large number of Gurkhas and tribals, into Assam.³⁷ While welcoming the Assam Accord they pleaded that cut-off date for them be 30 July 1976.³⁸ In a rally organised by the *All Assam Nepali Students Union* (AANSU) at Dhubri in January 1996, protests were made against not-fulfilment of the assurances made by the Union and State government. In a memorandum they demanded introduction of visa-passport system, permanent settlement to Nepali settlers, introduction of Nepali language in all educational institutions, membership of the Nepalis in UPSC and APSC and their inclusion in the Scheduled Tribes Status.³⁹ They have been sending their representatives to the State Assembly and their numerical strength in some constituencies had enabled them to play an important rôle in electoral politics.

The Assamese elite were resentful on the predominance of the Bengalis in every field. Harvard Professor Myron Weiner writes :

The Assamese found the Bengalis in a superior and himself in a subordinate position. The teacher is a Bengali, the pupil Assamese. The doctor is a Bengali, the patient Assamese. The pleader is

35. Bhawani Singh, *op. cit.*, 78-9; Nag. Sajal, 'Economic roots of the regional capitalist class; A Study of the Primitive Accumulation of the Marwari Community in colonial Assam', *NEIHA*, 1984, 164f.

36. Deb, Bimal and Lahiri, D. K., 'Gurkha Politics in Assam and its neighbourhood', *NEIHA*, 1992, 191f; Hussain, Manirul *op. cit.*

37. *Ibid.*, *The Assaniya*, 27 April 1946.

38. *Vide Minutes of the Action Committee of Assam Nepali organisation dated 9 September 1985. Appendix F.*

Movement leaders wanted expulsion of the migrants after 1966 on the ground the fecundity of the Nepalese comparatively higher and that in future the fate of Assam will be the same as that of Darjeeling (hitherto partly Sikimis and partly Bhutanese) where there were few Nepalese, but now gone up to ninety per cent of the total population. The immigration of the Nepalese will of course be a serious concern in case Indo-Nepalese Treaty (Clause 7) 1950, restriction is revised for which negotiations are in progress between the two governments.

39. *The Sentinel*, 20 January 1996; 26 February 1997.

Bengali, the client Assamese. The shopkeeper is Bengali, the customer Assamese. The Government official is Bengali, the petitioner Assamese.⁴⁰

The *Assam Domiciled and Settlers Association* (*Assam Citizens Association*), a middle class Bengali association, in its meeting at Nagaon, 24 March 1940, demanded for equal citizenship right and education through the medium of one's mother tongue.⁴¹ Already, educated Assamese had to face keen competition for jobs and business with the new-comers whether the Hindus or Muslims. Naturally, they apprehended that at no distant future while they would be swamped 'by sheer number of immigrant muslims', their language and culture would be obliterated in a predominantly Bengali State. 'Despite the rise of a powerful Assamese middle class in the twentieth century', B.P. Singh also maintains,⁴² 'the attitude of suspicion and hatred has not ebbed but further hardened for the obvious reason. Bengali factor is still real' and the apprehension of the Assamese intelligentsia that the immigrant Muslims who have already declared Assamese as their mother tongue are likely to declare Bengali in near future'. Such fears are at present imaginary than real inasmuch as the number of Bengali Hindus are on the decline.⁴³ With the spread of education and growing awareness of the government more and more locals are now occupying government jobs, even key posts, and directed their attention to other avenues of employment. Assamese men of letters, their language and literature, art and culture have of late received due recognition and admiration even from the luminaries of Bengal. The bogey of political domination of the Assamese by the immigrant Muslims still persists but there is hardly any possibility of political unity between the Bengali Hindu and Bangladeshi Muslims. 'Their hostility to each other far greater than their shared antagonism to the Assamese.'⁴⁴ In regard to the declaration of Bengali as mother tongue by the immigrants, the scholar himself admits community's future lies in a closer ties with the Assamese way of life and language. Economic consideration and even the

40. Weiner, Myron, *Son's of the Soil : Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India*, 115-6; Shikhar Gupta, *op. cit.*, 'The Bengal Syndrome', 124f.

41. *The Assam Tribune*, 24 March 1940.

42. Singh, B.P., *op. cit.*, 160-1.

43. *Infra.*, 45.

44. Weiner, Myron, *op. cit.*,

limited socialisation between the two communities over the last century should make this feasible.'

Recognised as the State language under the Eighth Schedule, Official Language Bill was introduced in Assam Assembly on 10 October 1960 declaring Assamese as the official language in Assam and provision was made for the use of Bengali in the district of Cachar. In fact, soon after the Partition Chief Minister Gopinath Bardoloi made an announcement in the Assembly that it was not the intention of the government to make Assam a bilingual State for the sake of homogeneity of the province and desired all non-Assamese to learn Assamese language. He must have felt Assam can by no means be different from Orissa, Andhra, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. All these states had tribal areas as scheduled districts, but each was allowed to include the scheduled districts into linguistic States and impose Oriya, Telegu and Hindi on the tribesmen. Though provision was made to remove the language barrier, Cachar and hill areas stood opposed on the apprehension this will place the non-Assamese in a disadvantageous position in the State services. Hence followed propaganda and counter-propaganda in the press and platform leading to fragmentation of Assam and killings, arson, looting and migrations in both the Valleys of the Brahmaputra and Barak.⁴⁵

The ruffled feelings of Cachar though mollified to some extent by Lal Bahadur Sastri's three language formula (1961) by making Bengali official language in the district of Cachar, violence erupted again in 1972 when the University of Gauhati resolved to make Assamese in place of English the medium of instruction and examination. Referring to the verdict of the Supreme Court in the case of *D.A.V. College versus the State of the Punjab* that 'no University can impose a medium of instruction on the minorities against their wish', the present writer, then a member of the Academic Council, made it clear that any attempt to make the regional language, the only medium in an institution having sizable number of minorities in utter disregard of their interests, is likely to harden their attitude and drag matters to a bitter end. This apart, a command over English, the link language, will continue to be indispensable in foreseeable future for employment prospects, particularly in Central Services, banking, insurance etc. Therefore, the writer suggested to maintain the *status quo* with option to answer in regional medium as was done in the University

45. Chattopadhyaya, Dilip Kumar, *History of Assamese Movement since 1947*, Chap. IV.

of Calcutta.⁴⁶ The resolution was however passed by a overwhelming majority.

To assuage the feelings of the Bengali speaking people of Cachar Assam Legislative Assembly rushed through a Bill to establish a separate University in Cachar. This was not acceptable to the *All Assam Student Union* (AASU) 'as detrimental to the accepted principle of linguistic State.' The leadership in Cachar construed it as 'cultural genocide' on linguistic minorities in Assam and hastened to the formation of the *Minority People's Right Committee* with the object of altering the language policy of the government or a further division of truncated Assam.⁴⁷ The subsequent movement for separation of Cachar⁴⁸ and erection of an Union territory of Purbachal would have been a *fait accompli* but for the opposition of the Bengali-dominated Tripuris and also of the Muslims of Cachar for fear of being reduced to a minority in the Union.⁴⁹

Paradoxically, while the number of Muslim immigrants were on the increase, the percentage of Bengali-speaking people was on the decline in Assam as will be seen from statistics below :⁵⁰

	1931	1951	1971
Bengali	30.06	20.99	19.71
Assamese	31.4	56.7	60.89

In explanation, the Superintendent of census operations in Assam (1961) observes :

While Bengali Hindus always returned Bengali and nothing else as their mother tongue, Bengali Muslim immigrants into Assam Valley, on the otherhand, have a tendency to return Assamese as their mother tongue even in the pre-independence days because what they want is land in the valley and if knowledge of Assamese can help them to become indigenous, they donot mind about their mother tongue. After independence the Bengali Muslim immigrants into

46. *Vide*, Proceedings, Academic Council, University of Gauhati, 12 June, 1972.

47. *The Statesman*, 6 November, 23 December 1972.

48. Barpujari, 'Separation of the Barak Valley', *The Assam Tribune*, 11-12 August, 1986.

49. Gupta, *op. cit.*, 138.

50. *Census*, 1971.

Assam Valley have, almost to a man, returned their mother tongue as Assamese whether they know the language or not.⁵¹

As a matter of fact, in the *census* of 1931 when linguistic tabulation was recorded, the district of Sylhet was an integral part of Assam having nearly a quarter of Bengali-speaking of the total population. The separation of Sylhet in 1947 and the desire of the Muslims immigrants like the tea tribes to adopt Assamese as a mother tongue in the land of their adoption, the number of Assamese-speakers rose from 31.4 percent 1931 to 56.7 percent in 1951-52. The immigrant Muslims identified themselves linguistically and culturally and returned their mother tongue as Assamese in successive censuses although they continued to speak their own language in their home. The Assamese naturally welcomed the immigrants, commonly known as *na Asamiyas*, who posed no problem to their language and culture. Moreover they boosted up the economy of the province.⁵³ They cleared the forest and reclaimed vast tracts, mostly fallow and unexplored lands, converting these into prosperous villages. The Assamese saw before their own eyes that cash crops like jute could be raised successfully and the same field would yield more than one crop. 'The people', in the words of P.G. Mukherjee, D.C., Nagaon,

have brought wealth, industry and general prosperity of the whole district. Their industry as agriculturist has become proverbial, and they extract from their fields the utmost that can yield. Their care and love of cattle is also an object lesson to others. Government revenue has increased, trade and commerce had prospered.⁵⁴

The honeymoon between the Assamese and immigrant muslims came to an end with the emergence of the Hill States—shrinking State's area from 223,550 to 78,523 sq. kms. Abundance of natural resources notwithstanding, Assam continued to be poor and industrially backward. While cultivable area remained unaltered, the production of food stuff could not keep pace with the explosion in population. There had been also the multiplication of educational institutions at all levels turning out

51. *Ibid.*, 1961, 204.

* The striking increase in the percentage of Assamese population has been attributed by R.B. Vaghaiwalla, Census Superintendent 1951, partly to 'aggressive Linguistic nationalism' in the Brahmaputra Valley (*census* 1961, 203) which is baseless as has been shown by his successor in 1961. With unabated inflow of immigrants, it is true, there has been a crisis of identity of the indigenous Assamese which has been discussed at length in this chapter.

52. *Ibid.*, 1951, 203.

53. *Ibid.* 1961, 254-55.

54. *Ibid.*, 1931, 52.

unemployed youths in geometrical progression. Lack of adequate job opportunities created social tensions and conflicts.

To aggravate the situation, the attitude of the immigrants underwent a radical change with their growing influence as 'vote bank.' In several past instances, according to authoritative sources, it was seen while they have permanently settled in Assam, 'their sympathies lie entirely with Pakistan.' This was borne out by the fact that they flew Pakistani flag with cries of 'Pakistan *zindabad*' in villages near Tezpur and Morajar area of the district of Nagoan at the hour when the Chinese were heading headlong towards Bomdila in November 1962.⁵⁵ Defensive measures apart, the Government of India had to take necessary action to delete and remove illegal immigrants from Assam. While a comprehensive scheme for detection and deportation of the migrants was on anvil, the party in power, namely the Congress, sought to legitimatise the infiltrators as they became a determining factor in the election.⁵⁶ So indispensable had become the massive support or block votes of these immigrants as well as of plantation labour to the Congress that one of its Presidents, namely Devakanta Barua, once said : 'so long as Alis* and coolies are with the Congress party, it did not care for any body'. Thus, the larger interest of the country including the threat to its very security and integrity were subordinated to serve the narrow party interests of the ruling party.⁵⁷ No less responsible an authority than the Election Commissioner Shamlal Shakhder saw this dangerous trend when he remarked:

In one State (Assam) the population in 1971 recorded an increase as high as 34.98 per cent over 1961 figure and this increase was attributed to the influx of large number of persons from the neighbouring country. The influx has become a regular feature, I think it may not be wrong assessment to make on the basis of the increase of 38.98 per cent between the two *censuses*, the increase

55. Gupta, Shekhar, *op. cit.*, *Prevention of Infiltration from Pakistan (PIP) Scheme*, Appendix 4, 201 ; Mullik, B.N., *My Years with Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal*, 281.

56. Shukla, B.P, *What Ail's India's North-East*, New Delhi, 1980, 24; also cited in Bhawani Singh, *op. cit.*, 74.

* 'Ali refers to Muslim immigrants and 'coolie' plantation labour. Moin-ul-Haq Choudhury, since inducted to Congress, and Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed were said to have urged the Congress to legitimatise these immigrants to secure their massive support to the Congress.

57. Sarin, V.I.K., *India's North East in Flames*, 1980, 39.

that is likely to be recorded in 1991 would be more than 100 per cent over the 1961 *census*.⁵⁸

Another disturbing factor, he added;

was the demand made by the political parties for the inclusion in the electoral rolls of the names of such migrants who are not citizens without even questioning and properly determining the citizenship status.

B.N. Mullik, the Chief of the Intelligence Bureau, brought home to the Government of India the national security risk soon after the Chinese invasion, 1962. Prevention of *Infiltration from Pakistan (PIP)*. Scheme was devised not only to check but deport infiltrators from Assam.⁵⁹ The scheme was to be financed by the Centre but to be implemented at the State level. With his ardent patriotism Assam Chief Minister B.P. Chaliha vigorously implemented the scheme for three years, after which he was told by the Home Ministry to hasten slowly on the cry of harassment of the minorities by the *Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Hind* and strong opposition of two of his Cabinet Ministers, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and Moin-ul-Haque Chaudhury. The relaxation of the scheme under Ministries of Golap Borbora and Jogen Hazarika and the appeasement policy consistently followed by the party in power accelerated the process of infiltration and multiplied the 'vote bank' of the Congress.⁶⁰

Thus, when the Congress leadership was interested only in their vote bank and not the security and integrity of the country, students and youths of Assam came to the forefront to take the lead in a mass movement for expulsion of foreigners. If the inflow of immigrants remain unabated, they feared, they will be reduced to a minority in their own homeland. What is the guarantee that Muslim-majority Assam will not make the demand for secession from India or even accession to Bangladesh. These fears and calculations were not without foundation. In his book *The Myths of Independence*, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan, claimed Assam when in 1968 he wrote :

It would be wrong to think that Kashmir is the only dispute that divide India and Pakistan, though it is undoubtedly the most significant...one nearly as important as Kashmir dispute that of

58. *Judicial Enquiry 9*; Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist*, 139; *Infra*, 71.

59. Gupta, *op. cit.*, Appendix 4, 20 f.

60. Bhawani Singh, *op. cit.*, 91-2, 103.

Assam and several districts adjoining to East Pakistan. To these East Pakistan has very good claims which should not have allowed to remain quiescent.⁶¹

Even Pro-India Bangladesh President Mujib-ur Rahman had his covetous eyes on Assam when he said: 'Eastern Bengal must have sufficient land for its huge population and Assam will give it a full scope for expansion because Assam has abundant forest, mineral resource, coal, petroleum etc.'⁶² Small wonder that intellectuals of Dacca invoking the theory of *lebensraum* or haven for the Muslims for the north-east India sought to create an independent *Banglabhumi* comprising Assam, West Bengal and Bihar.⁶³

In the thinly inhabited hill area of the north-east inspite of the *Inner Line* and safeguards under the Sixth Schedule, there has been apprehension amongst the tribals that they will be swamped by outsiders and reduced to minority in their own States. In Meghalaya, during 1971-91, although there is a fall in the number of Hindus, those of the Muslims increased to over 61,000 in 1991 from 26,000 in 1971 due to the influx of immigrants in the wake of the Indo-Pakistan war 1965.⁶⁴ There had also been an appreciable rise during the same period in the number of Nepalese who settled as porters, labourers and by and large graziers to meet the growing demand of dairy produce.⁶⁵ The increase in the number of immigrants altered the demographic pattern in the urban and border areas which had threatened, the tribesmen felt, economic, political and social life nay the very identity of the tribals.⁶⁶ The population of Nagaland too rose from 7,74,930 in 1981 to 12,15,573 in 1991. Of these, according to President *Naga Students Federation* (NSF) over 5,000 Bangladeshis in Mon district

61. *Ibid.*, 73.

62. *Ibid.*

63. B. B. Dutta, General Secretary, North-Eastern Congress—I, Co-ordination Committee said: 'The demand of Bangladeshi migrants for an independent, *Bangla Bhumi* is the result of India's tolerance of foreign migrants and failure to curb the infiltration along the borders. The committee held responsible the political parties including Congress-I and the CPM the policy of registering illegal immigrants as voters to create a vote-Bank for themselves'. Cited in 'Chaudhury. K. 'Influence Unbound: Problem of Indo-Bangladesh Border', *Fronthine*, 6 November, 1992, 24-5.

64. Bhuyan, J.N. 'Religious Communities of India'. *The Sentinel*, 24 July, 1995.

65. *Census* 1931, ch.i, 53.

66. Gassah, L.S. 'Social Tension in Meghalaya' in Bhattacharjee, J.B., ed., *Social Tension in North-East India*, *The Statesman*, 30 June, 1995.

alone.⁶⁷ As a counterpoise to MNF insurgents in 1950s the Centre had encouraged settlement in Mizoram of a section of the Chakmas from the Chittagong Hill Tracts then in East Pakistan.⁶⁸ Though small, the number of Hindu, Nepali and Muslim immigrants in Mizoram were also on the increase.

Unlike Assam, State governments in the hills had backed the student organisations in their drive against foreigners. *North-East Students' Co-ordination Committee* (NESCC), of which AASU was a member, had been opposing the presence of foreigners since Independence. In its memorandum to the Prime Minister, 3 April 1993, NESCC demanded an effective policy to detect, delete, deport and check up inflow of foreigners and illegal migrants into North-east, to scrap the IM (DT) Act 1983 and to deport illegal aliens under the Foreigners Act 1946. Of course, there are differences in the perception of the term 'alien' in different States. AASU wanted citizenship to all those who entered Assam prior to 25 March 1971. NSF equated non-Naga inhabitants with foreign nationals, who had no *locus standi* in Nagaland while Khasi Students Union (KSU) and NSF are demanding that 1951 be made the cut-off year. Arunachalese, on the other hand, have no cut-off year ; they want all foreigners to quit.⁶⁹

The anti-foreigner's movement took a serious turn at Shillong in 1979 when rioting took a heavy toll over thirty lives compelling outsiders to close their establishments. This was followed by the flight of the Nepalese, Marwaris, Assamese and particularly the Bengali Hindus who had made Meghalaya their home and contributed in no small degree to its economic, social and cultural progress.⁷⁰ In Nagaland political pressure crippled the functioning of the bureaucrats to such an extent that there had been reportedly an 'IAS drain'. Non-local businessmen had packed off their business being unable to meet ever-increasing demands of the militant outfits. Reports were emanating from time to time of the Mizos forcing *vaid*s or non-Mizos to flee and to take shelter in transit camps.⁷¹ In case the migrants did not have *Inner Line* permit, the government might ask them to quit, but there can be no valid reason for assault,

67. Bhuyan, J. N. *op. cit.*

68. Kalita, G.S., 'Pushing Arunachal to a disaster', *The Sentinel*, 13 December, 1994.

69. Chaudhury, Rabijit, 'Anti-Foreigner's Stir may dominate N.E. Politics' *The Statesman*, 30 June 1995; *The Sentinel*, 29 October 1994 ; 'The NESCC against aliens'. *The Sentinel*, 20 July 1994.

70. Barbhuyan, N. K., 'Cloud of Tribalism in Meghalaya', *The Sentinel*, 4, July 1994.

intimidation and violence in the name of eviction particularly of Indian citizens who can stay and work anywhere in the country.

Under the Radcliffe Award, Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) passed under the control of East Pakistan. In 1964 massive Kaptai Hydro-Electric project was commissioned near Rangamati which submerged thousand acres of arable land and about a lakh of refugees had to be rehabilitated. Of these, some settled in Mizoram, others North-Cachar Hills and about 60,000 Buddhist Chakmas and 6000 Hindu Hajongs in NEFA, now Arunachal Pradesh. In Tripura and Assam the refugees became Indian citizens while in Mizoram the Chakmas got even an *Autonomous District Council* enabling them to have an identity of their own distinct from the majority Mizos. The Chakmas and Hajongs in NEFA were settled under a definite scheme of rehabilitation provided with house, ration, medical and educational facilities in consultation with the State government.⁷² No complaint was received of their anti-national activities, yet they continued as stateless persons. In September 1992, M.M.Jacob, Union Minister of State for Home, and his successor P.M.Sayeed announced to grant citizenship to the Chakmas, but the Centre for obvious reasons held back necessary action to protect the interest of the ill-fated settlers.⁷³

The Central move was construed by the Arunachalis as 'deliberate attempt to dilute the native identity' and 'a threat to the demographic balance of the State'. The *All Arunachal Students Union* (AAPSU)* that had been spearheading anti-foreigner movement with the blessings of the Chief Minister Gegong Apang issued a quit notice to all foreigners : Chakmas, Hajongs, Tibetans, Nepalis and Bangladeshis to leave the State by 30 November 1994. The State government had also withdrawn the facilities enjoyed by them one after another. The registration certificate issued by the Centre became a mere scrap of paper and lands developed by refugees were occupied by the locals. Employment opportunities to the Chakmas were banned and trade licences stopped and those given earlier

71. *Ibid.*, 14 July 1994.

72. Ray Tapas, 'Arunachal Concerns', *Front Line*, 7 October, 1994, 31-2.

73. Barua, Utpal, 'Is North-East the dumping ground'. *The Sentinel*, 1 October 1994,; *The Statesman*, 29 October, 1994.

* AAPSU, established in 1941, has been voicing regional sentiments from time to time and makes local demands through memoranda and letters to national media on reservation of jobs to the Arunachalis, boundary disputes, withdrawal of trade licenses and allotment of lands to non-Arunachalis.

were cancelled. Allegations were made that a section of the Chakmas were undergoing arms training and manufacturing weapons, and in retaliation batches of Arunachal youths were sent to Nagaland and Myanmar to undergo similar training under NSCN (K).⁷⁴

As the deadline was drawing near, AAPSU created panic by brandishing arms and compelled some 2000 Chakmas from Papumpare district to take shelter in the Gohpur reserve forest in Assam. To prevent further influx, the Government of Assam clamped night curfew and issued shoot at sight order along the border in the Tinsukia district, opposite to Changlang having a large Chakma concentration. On the expiry of the earlier quit notice, following AAPSU's new deadline the Centre deployed CRPF units to maintain law and order in the State. According to Central Intelligence the situation continued to be 'fluid and explosive' which might lead to insurgency and counter-insurgency unless effective steps were taken to diffuse tension in that quarter.⁷⁵ Following a petition filed by the *National Human Rights Commission* (NHRC), the Supreme Court made it clear that 'except in accordance with law' the Chakmas shall not be evicted from their home's, and that any attempt to forcibly evict should be 'repelled' by the government which if required should ask for more troops and directed the Centre to accept any such request.⁷⁶

The policy of drift which had been keynote of the policy of Union government on the Chakmas had been occasioned by the fact that Arunachal is a sensitive border State and any hasty decision on this issue will not minimise but increase the complexities of the problem. An announcement of the status of the refugees, as in Tripura and Mizoram, following creation of Arunachal, would have averted the present impasse. The Arunachalis not unreasonably fear that separatist tendencies will develop amongst the Chakmas with the natural growth of the newcomers as had happened in Mizoram*. Admittedly, Arunachal is larger enough

74. *Ibid.*,

75. *The Statesman*, 30 September, 28 December, 1994.

76. *The Sentinel*, 11 January 1996.

* Prior to the formation of Mizoram as a Union Territory in 1971, the Chakmas had a *Regional Council* under the Greater Lushai Council. This was later upgraded to a *District Council*. Since this council was not so powerful for all round socio-economic development of the tribals, the Chakma organisation of the country submitted a memorandum demanding an union territory covering the present district council areas.

to give shelter to the Chakmas; yet it cannot be made solely responsible for rehabilitation of all the refugees. The Centre must ensure that Chakma refugees are resettled in their original home or equitably distributed all over the country.

Situated in the south-west corner of Assam, Tripura was inhabited by the Bengali migrants and mainly by Tripuris, Reangs, Jamatias, Moatias, Halams and several ethnic groups. 'It is one of the few States in the world where in the twentieth century, an indigenous people has been transformed from a numerical majority ruling community into a minority depending on the good will and largesse of immigrants who have seized economy and political influences'.⁷⁷ In 1947, the tribesmen accounted for 93 per cent of the population, but the exodus in the post-partition period of the Bengali Hindus from the neighbouring districts rose from 646,000 to 1.15 million in 1961 and 2.1 million in 1981, the tribals dwindled to 28.5 per cent. The majority of them lost their lands in the plains to the non-tribals and retreated into the interior of the hills and forests⁷⁸ in the State.

Over the years there had emerged amongst these tribals a middle class elite who sought white collared jobs, but there was hardly any avenue left for them since the administration had already been packed with non-tribals... The little trade and commerce that developed in that nearly isolated and land-locked State was also in the hands of the non-tribals. Land remained as it is in every tribal area the only source of wealth and on the land there was an increasing pressure of the refugee population.⁷⁹

Since Tripura's merger with India (1956) the influence of the Congress was exclusively limited to the Bengali migrants while the communists won a foothold on the support of the tribesmen. In 1967, the militant section of the tribals formed the *Tripura Upajati Juba Samity* (TUJS). It made demands for the creation of an *Autonomous District Council* under the Sixth Schedule, restoration of the tribal lands illegally

77. Hazarika, *op. cit.*, 123; *India Today*, 16-30, June, 31.

78. Das Gupta, Malavika, 'Regionalism and Separatist forces in Tripura' in B. Pakem, *Regionalism in India*, 308f.

79. Sareen, H.K. *Insurgency in North-east India*, 79; Ganguli, J.B. 'Pattern and occupational structure of Tribal Population of Tripura' in Asish Bose, ed., *Tribal Demography and Development in North-east India*.

transferred, recognition of *Kak-borok* language and adoption of Roman instead of Bengali script. In 1978 the Leftists returned from twelve out of sixteen constituencies reserved for the tribals. This was followed by the recognition of *Kak-borok* language and measures to restore lands taken away from the tribals without permission of the district magistrate. *Autonomous District Council* was also set-up which received President's assent in 1979, of course, under the Fifth Schedule. TUJS considered these measures as inadequate and unsatisfactory. It continued agitation while the extremists having little faith in political parties and even TUJS formed *Tribal National Volunteers* (TNV) under Bijoy Hrangkhawl, an educated Kuki, who has his own ideas about tribal autonomy⁸⁰. TNV believes in an 'Independent Tripura' freed from Indian Union and rid of its 1.5 million non-tribals⁸¹.

The immigrant Bengalis realised that with the formation of the *Autonomous District Council*, apart from substitution of their language, nearly three-fourth of the territory would serve only one fourth of the population; that the non-tribals would be scattered in contiguous tribal areas. To safeguard their interests when there emerged the *Amra Bangali*, a militant movement, the TNV construed it as a challenge to the sons of the soil. They resolved on the expulsion of all the foreigners who entered into Tripura from 15 October 1947, the date of merger of the State into Indian Union. Sporadic killings had been going on over a year, but the 'goriest one' was committed on 7 June 1980 at Mandai and Maharani leaving over 700 dead and 60,000 homeless. Hrangkhawl is said to have 'remote controlled' the massacre and the negotiations which he carried on with the government culminated in the agreement on 12 August 1988. TNV cadres undertook to abjure violence, surrender with arms and not to support any other extremist group. The government on its part assured rehabilitation of those coming overground through development schemes. The autonomous district area was to include tribal villages excluding non-tribal majority areas and ensuring representation in legislature with a minimum of 28 seats. Over and above, the government undertook to adopt

80. In a letter to the Indian Prime Minister wrote Hrangkhawl : 'Armed insurgency was necessary to reach your heart ... Either you deport all foreign nationals who infiltrated into Tripura after 15 October 1947 or settle them anywhere in India other than Tripura ... delaying implementation of our demands means the TNV will fight for total self-determination. We demand a free Tripura'; Tarapot P., *Insurgency Movement in North-Eastern India*, cited in Verghese, B.K., *India's North-east*, 176f.

81. Dasgupta Barun. 'Background to Tripura Tribal crisis', *Mainstream*, 3 January 1987: Sumit Mitra, 'Tripura Trouble-Probe'. *India Today*, 31 May 1985, 53-4.

necessary measures to prevent infiltration from across the border by strengthening the border outposts.⁸²

Several militant outfits, *National Liberation Front* (NLFT), *All Tripura Tiger Front* (ATTf), *Tripura Resurrection Army* (TRA) went underground and continued their ambushes, kidnappings and killings. Since 1994 crime rate showed an upward trend. The emergence of *Indigenous People's Front of Tripura* headed by Hrangkhwal added a new dimension with demands of conversion of the *Autonomous District Council* area into a full-fledged State and introduction of *Inner Line Regulation*. Backed by the support of the NSCN and the ULFA, including arms, NLFT and ATTf had also demanded *Swadhin* (Independent) Tripura and expulsion of all the aliens who entered after October 1949. Inadequacy of mobile task-force and an open porous border over 800 kms. had rendered it difficult for the Left Front government to check effectively infiltrators from across the international border; on the otherhand, by a notification it had asked the rebels to surrender by a dead line which the latter had categorically refused until fulfilment of their basic demand, the creation of a sovereign State.⁸³

On 15 October 1949 Manipur was formally merged with the Indian Union. The Meiteis, the dominant ethnic group in the Imphal valley, resented on the merger without consulting the Council of Ministers and particularly final ceding of the Kabaw valley* by Nehru's government to appease the Burmese government. To their utter disappointment the Meiteis found that the *Mayongs* or non-Manipuris had been monopolising all the opportunities following Manipur's integration with India. While they were debarred from acquiring land in the hills, the hillmen in the north (Nagas) and the south (Kukis and Mizos) were allowed freely occupy land in the valley. The preferential treatment meted out to the tribesmen as scheduled tribes enabled them to have the monopoly of the key-posts under the government while avenues of employment were closed to the Meitei youths coming out in ever increasing numbers from

82. Sumit Mitra 'Wanton Killings', *India Today*, June 16-30, 1980, 31-2, 16-31, August 1980. Verghese, *op. cit.*

83. *Ibid.*, Lama, J.B., 'Tripura Backwater', *The Statesman*, 13 January 1997; *The Sentinel*, 20 February 1997.

* In 1834 the Kabaw valley between eastern border of Manipur and the river Chindwin was made over by the East India Company to the King of Ava in consideration 'for his Majesty's feelings and wishes and in a spirit of amity and good will.'

the colleges and schools in the valley. The attitude of the authorities at the Centre and the State was one of total indifference. The growing pressure on land, competition for jobs, total neglect of development and discriminatory policy of the government drove the Meiteis to launch a movement to deport the *Mayongs* from Manipur.⁸⁴

In 1964, there had emerged the *United Liberation Front* (UNLF) with the object of achieving 'national self-determination' with support of the Naga and Mizo underground. Two other militant outfits soon came to the forefront : *People's Liberation Army of Kangleipak* (Manipur), commonly known as PREPAK, and *People's Liberation Army* (PLA). under O. Sudhir Kumar the former laid emphasis from armed insurgency or terrorism to mass political work; the latter headed by Bisheswar Singh, closely linked with Peking, sought to organise 'a revolutionary front' covering the entire North-east to free Manipur and overthrow the 'Delhi-bandit government'. In 1980 the spurt in activities of the PLA, PREPAK and the formation of *Kangleipak Communist Party* (KCP), and similar outfits alarmed the State government to declare these unlawful and the Imphal valley a 'disturbed area'⁸⁵.

84. Sarin V.L.K., *India's North-east in Flames*, 117f; Singh, N. Jay Kumar, 'The Merger of Manipur into India; A Reassessment, *NEIHA*, 1995, 145-52.

85. Sareen H.K. *op. cit.*, 54-5; Verghese, *op. cit.*, 119f.

Anti-Foreigner's Movement

In Assam the matter came to a head in April 1979. A bye-election had to be held on the death of Hiralal Patowari, M.P. in the Mangaldai constituency. The voter's list was revised and in the process a large number of foreigners were detected. Objections were raised against 70,000 men, and of these 45,000, about one-sixth of the electors, were declared foreigners by competent courts. What would be the condition in other constituencies?—the question arose. Since 1973, AASU had been demanding detection and removal of the foreigners from voter's list and this was opposed by Muslim Ministers Zahirul Islam and A.F. Golam Osmani. About this time Moraji Desai resigned and Charan Singh formed a care-taker government, but President N. Sanjiva Reddy ordered a fresh general election. Election Commissioner Shakhder was also told not to eliminate any voter from the rolls on the ground 'the process of establishing citizenship is time-consuming' The Commission was advised 'scrutiny of rolls would be done after the election is over'.¹

The AASU which had been spearheading the anti-foreigner's movement declared 'no revision, no election'. What they wanted was three D's: detection, deletion and deportation of the foreigners prior to the election of 14 Lok Sabha seats in Assam. Under the leadership of young, affable and dedicated President Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and General Secretary Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, the movement started on 6 November 1979 with mass rally of the people at Guwahati to demand immediate settlement of the foreigner issue. They had the solid support of the *All Asom Gana Sangram Parishad* (AAGSP) with its constituents *Asom Sahitya Sabha*, *Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal* (AJD) and *Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad* (PLP). Then followed a week long *Satyagraha*, strikes, *bandhs* and round-the-clock picketing of oil installations keeping the refineries of Digboi, Guwahati, Bongaigaon and Barauni starving crude supplies

1. Murty. *op.cit*, 10-11.

from oil fields.²

So intense was the feeling of the Assamese and such was the movement of agitation that in its wake two popular governments were swept out of office in quick succession, all major political parties pulverised, wheels of public sector undertaking brought to a grinding halt, all education institutions close down for months together and election in 12 out of 14 *Lok Sabha* constituencies scuttled.³

To the leftist forces, economic factor, under development and under utilization of economic potentialities were at the root of anti-foreigner's movement.^{3a} They had totally ignored that it was not so much economic as political compulsions that goaded AASU to launch the movement and this was duly stressed in the memorandum they submitted to the Prime Minister (*Appendix-B*). All that the student leadership wanted was a place of honour in their own homeland which would be possible only if they retain their majority. In 1979 Muslim MLAs joining hands with the Bengali Hindus opposing detection and deportation of foreigners withdraw their support to the Ministry. When they were joined by the Congress I and the CPM, the Ministry failed and President rule promulgated. The very fact that the Assam Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia had to make a *volte-face* subsequently on the issue of foreigners*, clearly indicates the growing influence of the immigrant Muslims in the State Assembly.

The movement was conducted initially in the most disciplined, orderly and peaceful manner. Every precaution was taken to maintain its secular character and not to degenerate it into a violent agitation. Situation soon went out of control. Disturbance broke out in pockets of Bengali-speaking population at Tinsukia, Dumduma, Duliajan and Naharkatiya. For fear of being attacked, minority Assamese in Lumding and Naharkatiya had to take shelter elsewhere. Violence occurred in North Kamrup on the

2. *The Assam Tribune*, 13, 18 November, 1983; Singh, Bhawani, *op cit.* 96-7. The closure of the refineries hit hard the Indian economy. There had been a daily loss of production of diesel 5000 tones, petroleum products, a national loss, approximately 810 millions of rupees while 14,000 tones of crude per day with a daily loss of not less than 30 million rupees. Besides Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, there occurred acute shortage of petroleum throughout North-east India. Nihedon, N., : *The Ethnic Explosion*, New Delhi, 1981, 131; 'Back to Barricades', *India Today*, 16-30 November, 1980.

3. Sarin, V.I.K. *op. cit.*, 34-5.

3a. Chaudhury, Dilip Kumar, *The History of Assamese movement since 1947*, 173.

* *Infra*, 121.

demands of funds on the Muslim immigrants for the *satyagraha*. Repercussions were felt even in Cachar when certain areas were declared 'disturbed'. On 18 January 1980, violence occurred at Duliajan resulting in police firing and the most gruesome murder of Dr Rabin Mitra, Technical Manager of the Oil India Limited.⁴ In its issue of 23 January 1980, *The Times of India* remarked :

Whether the *All Assam Students Union* and *Gana Sangram Parishad* intended the matter to come to this pass or not, they must bear the major share of the responsibility for the orgy of rioting, arson, plunder and murder which has already taken toll of nearly 50 lives and displaced thousands...The peril to a substantial Bengali community and the danger of repercussions elsewhere make Calcutta's concern perfectly valid. It would be tragic indeed if this anxiety were not shared in New Delhi which seems rather more interested in courting Assamese militants with an eye to the expected elections.

In utter disgust and anguish at the tragic events in Upper Assam, the members of the Parliament demanded firm action against miscreants. Assuring the members to take effective measures to restore normalcy, the Union Minister of State for Home, P. Venkatsubaiah informed the House 'between August 1979 and January 1980, seventy eight person lost their lives in violent clashes and police firing in Assam. There were about 120 incidents of arson and 127 cases of assault. Over 3,2000 houses in about 40 villages had been burnt down and as a result 15,000 people rendered homeless.'^{4a}

Assam was in the top of the agenda of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who returned to power in January 1980. On the foreigners issue, AASU-AAGSP started parleys with the Prime Minister and the Home Minister in Delhi on 2-5 February. Of the several demands presented in a memorandum (*Appendix-B*) by the student leaders to the Prime Minister in the first round of talks, the Centre agreed that the names of the foreigners must be removed from the electoral rolls for holding any election in Assam. The problem arose on the cut-off date : while AASU - AAGSP agreed to accept all the foreigners that entered Assam between 1951-61, the Centre wanted to have 25 March 1971 on the ground *Indira-Mujib Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace*, 1972 had imposed an obligation on the Government of India to accept all refugees who came

4. 'The Danger of Secession', *India Today*, February. 16-29, 1980.

4a. *India Today*, 30 November, 1982, 25-6.

to India before 1971.⁵ In later talks students leaders suggested that electoral rolls of 1952 instead of National Certificate of 1951 be accepted as the basis deleting foreign nationals. They were further agreeable to share an equitable burden of pre-1971 migrants, but unwilling to distinguish between infiltrators on the basis of religion.⁶ The Government of India expressed its reluctance to uproot those who had permanent habitation on Indian soil, and on this issue deadlock continued and no break-through was in sight despite twenty seven round of talks at various levels.⁷

The movement dragged on. The political parties were divided in their opinion. Depended as it was entirely on the support of the foreigners, the Congress I stood against the movement. Backed by the party in power there had emerged in March 1980 the *All Assam Minority Student's Union* (AAMSU) to safeguard the interests of the foreigners and on 28 May following they organised mass rallies at Barpeta and Howli carrying Bangladesh flags and shouting *Joy Bangla* (long live Bangladesh). Most of the Opposition supported the government while the minorities had fallen behind the CPI(M). The latter, mostly Bengali Hindus, feared apart from the loss of votes, the migrants were likely to be sent to West Bengal where their resettlement would create a serious financial problem for the State government. 'If there should be a influx of refugees from Assam', said Barun Sengupta ; 'the fate of West Bengal government would be sealed automatically. Neither will West Bengal be able to provide them with adequate food and shelter without the help from the Centre nor will it subsequently be possible to maintain the linguistic harmony of the State.'⁸

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5. In regard to refugees or immigrants, there is nothing in the *Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Peace between India and Bangladesh*, 19 March 1972, which was signed by Ms Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman (*Vide Appendix-A*). In the *Joint Declaration of 8 February 1972* the Prime Minister of India simply assured 'the continuance of all possible assistance to the Government of Bangladesh in the unprecedented task of the re-settling the refugees and displaced persons in Bangladesh' (*Not in India*).
 6. Singh, *op.cit*, 66; Murty, *op.cit*, 38-44.
 7. These were started from 2 February 1980 to 5 June 1983: 22 bipartite at 5 tripartite at various levels. Murty, *op. cit.*, 260f. In spite of their immaturity and inexperience, the student leaders exhibited a rare degree of sobriety and balance of judgement in the talk which was highly commendable. Eloquently Bhawani Singh remarks : 'In characteristic style of Government of India, they were lodged in the capital's five star hotels, well fetted and accorded VIP treatment. It goes to the credit of the agitation leaders that none of these things put any impression on them and in negotiations that followed, they did not barter away their main demands for these luxuries.'
 8. *Sunday*, 8 June 1980, cited in Das, A.K., *Assam's Agony; A Socio-Economic and Political Analysis*, 200.

In March 1982, Ms Gandhi endeavoured to install a Congress-I ministry in Assam. Her first nominee Anwara Taimur had fallen after six months and Keshab Gogoi in two. She was greatly disappointed and found that a Congress-I Ministry could not be formed with the existing Assembly. As interim measure President's rule was declared in march with R.V. Subrahmanium as Principal Adviser to the Governor.⁹ Election in the State before the expiry of President's rule thus became a constitutional necessity.¹⁰ The question arose whether a free and fair election would be possible when lakhs of infiltrators had entered Assam and of these nearly half had already had their names in the electoral rolls ? Will it not be a mockery of election in the presence of too many illegal voters ?

New Delhi faces a cruel choice in Assam. It will run serious risks whether it decides to go ahead with the poll or to defer it. But it must be willing to weigh the risks once again and decide which course is less risky in balance. It must not stand on false prestige. Democratic regime do not involve force while dealing with its own people.¹¹

Magasaysay Award winning journalist Arun Shourie has unearthed several secret documents which reveal that Ms Gandhi's primary objective was to install a Congress-I Ministry in Assam on the expiry of the President's rule and no less to crush the AASU boys who continued to be intransigent on the cut off year* The strategy was 'to isolate the largest group' 'fomenting insecurity in other groups' and presenting Congress-I as the only saviour. To that end 'electoral rolls should not be purged of non-Indians'. She was well aware every one would oppose and boycott the election clearing the path for the victory of the Congress-I. Accordingly it was officially announced that the election would be held on 14, 17 and 20 February 1983 on the basis of 1979 rolls without any revision.¹²

9. Arun Shourie, 'Assam Election, Come What May', *India Today*, 15 May 1985, 54 f.

10. Constitution Compulsion could have been avoided. *The Statesman*, 25 Feb 1983 ; *Judicial Enquiry*, 53-5.

11. *India Today*, 30 November 1982, 25-6.

* On the eve of election, Rajesh Pilot, Congress I M.P. was enquired by journalist Shekhar Gupta whether he was serious about election in Assam. He was told : 'all people are fed up. They want election. They want a political government'. While he was warned that 'there will be bloodshed', the reply was, 'the agitators must be taught politically and the problem will be solved, if 5000 of these were put on the jail for the election period. *Assam : A Valley Divided*, 29.

12. Gupta, *op. cit.*, 21-2.

On failure of last round of talks AASU-AAGSP leaders left Delhi on January 7th and on arrival at the Guwahati airport they were arrested and detained under the National Security Act. To the movement leaders government decision on election was 'a frontal attack to the people of Assam'; they determined to stop election by all means¹³. The BJP, Janata and Lok Dal (C) also boycotted the polls calling it a 'fake election'. 'We just do'nt know', said M.P. Jaswant Singh BJP, 'why it (government) precipitated the crisis by going to the polls without solving the foreigner's issue.' It was destined to be a 'battle of bullet' rather than ballot.¹⁴

Revision of electoral rolls had been one of the basic demand of the movement leaders. Even MP Baharul Islam, who left his seat to contest as a Congress candidate, admitted : 'It would have been more desirable for the rolls to have been more properly revised'. Said Achintya Bhattacharjee, Marxist leader(M) : 'The rolls are defective as names of a large number of Bengali and Muslim were deleted when these were prepared in 1979'. Therefore, CPI and CPI(M) who called the movement as secessionists, desired election after amendment of electoral rolls. Assamese intelligentsia, including mediamen, were in favour of election after meeting aspirations of the people, a solution of the problem of the foreigners. While minority organisations-Muslims, Bengalis, tribals and tea-tribes favoured early election.¹⁵

Election personnel had to be recruited from outside the State on the refusal of the *Karmachari Parishad* (Council of the State Staff) to perform election duties despite inducements and threats of pay cuts, break in service and disciplinary action. The organisation of general election in such a situation proved a 'stupendous task'.¹⁶ The Tewari Commission admitted :

Polling personnel had to be brought from outside... Ballot paper and electoral rolls had to be got printed elsewhere as the local presses would not take up the job. Supplies of other requirement had also to be from outside the State...candidates had to be given protection...Polling personnel had to be escorted...Minority pockets linguistic, ethnic and religious had to be protected. Lines of

13. *The Assam Tribune*, 7-8 January 1983.

14. Sumanta Sen in Guwahati, 'Sounding Battle Station', *India Today*, 15 February 1983, 20-2.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Tewari Commission*, 395-6

communication and bridges and polling stations which were the main targets of attack had to be protected from arson and damage.¹⁷

While the moderate leadership were under detention, anti-poll agitation passed under the control of the extremists who destroyed public buildings, roads and bridges, sabotaged rail-tracks, besides *bandhs*, intimidation, black outs *Janata* (people's) curfews to stall election. The government clamped down section 144 Cr. P.C. and enforced Assam Disturbed Area Act 1983 and Assam Armed Force special powers Act 1958. The entire district was in a state of siege by the police. CRPF, BSF and other paramilitary forces who had occupied all the educational and public places.¹⁸

The RSS and other fundamentalists were said to have links with student leaders and that the *Swechcha Sevak Bahini* (SSB) of AASU was formed in 1980 at RSS initiative.¹⁹ Inflammatory speeches made by the political leaders including Ms Gandhi during her electioneering tour in immigrant-dominated areas triggered off communal fury leading to acts of arson, looting, killing and wanton destruction of properties. The highly provocative speeches of Atal Behari Vajpayee and Abdul Ghani Khan Chaudhury, Union Railway Minister, reported to have led to a chain of massacres in the districts of Kamrup, Darrang and Nagaon.²⁰ Journalist Sekhar Gupta noticed in the second round of election, massacre of about 500 immigrant Muslims at Chawlkhowa in the south of Mangaldoi and an equal number of Bengali Hindus around Khoirabari in the north of the same township. On 12-14, February the Boros accompanied by tea-garden labourers armed with bows, arrows, *daos* and spears attacked Gohpur and villages nearabout in the districts of Sonitpur killing over 150 men and

17. *Ibid.*

18. *The Assam Tribune*, 1 February 1983, *Judicial Enquiry*, 20 f.

19. Rafiabadi, H.N. *Assam Agitation to Accord*, New Delhi, 1985, 5; 'The Communal Divide', *India today*, 15 May 1985.

20. Said Atal Behari Vajpayee: 'Foreigners have come here and the government does nothing. What if they have come into Punjab itself, people would have chopped up into pieces and thrown them away'. (Gupta, *op.cit.*, 35). More provocative was the address of Ghani Khan Chaudhury to the immigrant Muslims at Nilbagan (Nagaon): 'Today you are in danger. So I have come here on my own initiative. I have come to tell you that when you are in danger, you shall take blood for blood. If one person from you is killed, you must have the courage to kill two Hindus.' *Judicial Enquiry*, Annexure T, English version of the speech of Ghani Khan Choudhury at Nil Bagan, 221; *The Assam Tribune*, 20 February, 1983.

women, burning houses and rendering over 2500 homeless. On 18 February, in retaliation of killings of their kinsmen and grabbing of ancestral possessions the Lalung (Tiwas) tribesmen committed the most brutal massacres of old, women and children of immigrant Muslim villages in and around Nellie in the district of Morigaon.²¹ *The Times of India* deplored :

After the great Calcutta killing in 1946, the Nellie killing 1983....Nothing so gruesome has disgraced India since partition riots...just as Calcutta is indelibly imprinted in their minds so will Nellie be...In all probability it would not have taken place if the authority had not pressed ahead with the ill-conceived move even after....it (made) abundantly clear that the poll would not settle any issue and would greatly aggravate the situation. The killing could have been avoided if sobre counsel prevailed in the minds of those who forced this injudicious election.²²

Admittedly, 'the difficulties of the terrain' as explains the Tewari Commission, 'disruption in the means of communication—roads, bridges, telecommunication system rendered impossible prompt and speedy measures for restoration of law and order in disturbed areas.'²³ To these must be added the functioning of the civil and police authorities 'in complete abdication of their constitutional and legal obligation'. To carry out the wishes of the High Command, there had emerged a 'coterie' headed by the Adviser Subrahmanium who was ably aided by the pliant S.K. Khosla then succeeded Shamlal Shakhder as CEC. In the meetings of the Security Coordination Committee which held almost every day, Subrahmanium is said to have harped on 'Election must be held... come what may, the flag must fly'. Visiting every district, Subrahmanium-Khosla brought home to every one 'law and order was of secondary importance election was all that matters.'²⁴ How could the Deputy Commissioner, Darrang, comply with the request of MP Purnanarayan Singh when the latter approached him to hasten military aid to Gohpur where the situation was extremely grave. Despite wireless messages one

21. *The Assam Tribune*, 14-15; 21 February 1983; Editorial, *The Times of India*, 22 February; *India Today*, 15 March 1983; Gupta, *op cit.*, 2f; *Judicial Enquiry*, Ch.V.

22. *The Times of India*, 26 February 1983.

23. *Tewari Commission* : 'Evasive Answer', *op.cit*

24. Arun Shourie, *op. cit.*

after another from DC Nagaon and SDC Jagiroad, CRPF personnel did not move out to Nellie in time : their first task was to protect the persons on election duty.²⁵ The result was macabre carnage mentioned above.

In regard to the character of the disturbances there is not much difference in the official and non-official reports. The victims were all sections of the population, not confined to a particular section religious, ethnic or linguistic. In some places Assamese were the attackers and the victims both Hindus and Muslims. While in other places immigrant Muslims were the attackers and Assamese victims. In several places clashes took place between the various sections of the Assamese themselves. In a few places Muslims joined hands with others in attacking their co-religionists.²⁶ The redeeming feature was that 'the Assamese Muslims stood solidly behind their Hindu bretheren setting an excellent example of inter-communal amity, harmony and solidarity.'

An impartial observer will have to admit that the leadership of the movement had genuine fear that unending immigration across the border will reduce the indigenous people into a minority and the fate of Assam will be the same as that of Sikkim and Tripura. With high hopes the leadership started negotiations with the Prime Minister to arrive at an appropriate solution to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of the people. Throwing to winds earlier commitments* and announcing that no election will be held without revising the rolls,** Ms Gandhi imposed the election which inevitably led to sharp and violent reaction. Hence followed killings in thousands irrespective of age or sex, rendering homeless nearly a lakh and destruction of properties worth millions. The election of 1983 and the holocaust in its wake will ever remain an indelible scar in the political career of Ms Indira Gandhi.

The government claimed that the majority of the people of the State who had faith in democratic institutions and who choose to vote even in the face of grave hazard should be accepted with a pinch of salt. Voting was very poor in the Valley of the Brahmaputra and even in Cachar dominated by Bengalis it was moderate., In several areas booths could not

25. *Ibid*, ; *Judicial Enquiry*, 120.

* To enquire into the holocaust a non-official committee was set-up in the same year with Justice T.U. Mehta as Chairman and Ganesh Phukan IAS and Professor Raihan Shah members. The Government of Assam also appointed a one-man Committee under Tribhuvan Prasad Tewari IAS, to enquire into the circumstances leading the disturbances of 1983 and to suggest measures to prevent recurrence of such incidents in future. The report submitted by the Commission was by and large on the basis of the official memorandum dated 15 January 1984.

26. Gupta, *op.cit*, 22f., *Judicial Enquiry*, see mode and results. 134-40; *Tewari Commission* 396.

** *Supra*, 59.

be set-up at all by persons brought from outside the State. Though Congress I had a landslide victory, the voting percentage was disappointing; Goalpara 38, Kamrup 12, Sonitpur 28, Upper Assam less than 10.^{26a} Congress victory was 'worse than defeat', and the price to be paid was heavy : 'communal tension has reached new heights...The dominant community has been further alienated and extremism and violence have acquired much wider acceptability in the Brahmaputra Valley.'

On 27 February, 1983 the most dynamic and astute politician, Hiteswar Saikia took the oath (first term) as the Chief Minister of Assam. Born in 1934 in a middle class family near Nazira, Upper Assam, Saikia graduated from the St. Edmunds College, Shillong, and obtained his M.A. degree in History of the Lucknow University. Starting his career as assistant teacher in the Nazira Higher Secondary School, he joined as a lecturer in History and Vice-Principal of the nearby Garhgaon College in 1970. Destined to be a politician not a historian, Hiteswar was elected to the State Assembly in 1972. Well aware of the potentialities of this youth, 28, ex-Chief Minister Sarat Chandra Sinha inducted him to his Ministry in 1974 and placed under him two vital portfolios, Home and Education. He had his Cabinet rank and the charge of Home in the Ministries of Sayeeda Anwara Taimur (Dec. 1980-June 1981) and Keshab Gogoi (Jan-March 1982). In spite of the fact that he lived on a borrowed kidney donated by his brother and on restricted food, Saikia had immense capacity to work to the tune of twenty hours a day, as recorded by his biographers. With his ripe experience, administrative acumen and deft manoeuvring he weathered storms one after another that rocked the State and made himself indispensable to the Centre and the State after the controversial election, 1983.²⁷

The immediate task before Saikia was to cleanse the Augean stables inducting trusted bureaucrats and showering favours to those whom he wanted as a counterpoise to the agitators. Agitation remained unabated. There had been strikes, picketings, *bandhs* followed by arrests, shootings and crackdowns. Enthusiasm however lost its vigour, *bandhs* and blackouts continued. People did not defy these (*even now*) for fear of victimization by pro-agitation elements. If someone kept light off or did not move out in a car during *bandh*, it did not mean that he supported the agitation as

26a. Dasgupta Keya and Guha Amalendu 'The 1983 Assembly Poll in Assam : An Analysis of its Background and Implications', *NEIHA* 1983, 235f.

27. For his life and career, see Bora, Mohendra, *Hiteswar Saikia, The Swooping Sparrow*, New Delhi, 1993.

he did earlier. People were tired of thoughtless *bandhs* and destructive activities which hit only the common man and development works. The silver lining was opponents of agitators had come out openly to appeal to the people not to respond such *bandh* calls.²⁸ It was not an empty boast when Saikia declared: 'I have controlled the situation. People said there would be violence on the Independence Day. There were none, I will manage the winter also, I am confident'.²⁹ The claim to return to normalcy was borne out by the fact that bulk of the para-military forces had been withdrawn in less than a year and the number was reduced from 341 to 34. Allegation of atrocities being levelled against CRPF, these were gradually moved out of the State and stress was laid on raising a Task Force for protection of the people in rural areas.³⁰

The return of normalcy notwithstanding, AASU-AAGSP ridiculed Saikia's government as 'illegitimate' based as it was on minority votes.³¹ The people defied movement leader's call not to cooperate with the 'illegitimate' government. The irony was even well known supporters of the leadership flocked to the corridors of power at Dispur to seek favours of Congress-I ministers. Not unoften newsman enquired Saikia of his legitimacy; the reply was 'no one had any noise when elections were held on the basis of the same electoral rolls in the past', and that 'people were free to challenge the existing voters nationality before the Courts of law.'³²

Ms. Gandhi again visited Assam in February 1984 and laid the foundation of the new capital at Chandrapur. In her speeches at Guwahati and Tinsukia she announced that the government was prepared to resume talks on the alien issue, but only with the participation of the State government, indirectly hinting at legitimacy of the Saikia's government.³³

28. That there was a popular aversion to such *bandhs* was seen in the poor response to the call for boycott of Prime Minister's gathering on the occasion of the foundation laying ceremony of new capital at Chandrapur and a large audience responding to Ms Gandhi's presence. Sabherwall, O.P., *Mainstream*, 30 June, 1984, 1-3., 'Assam: No more Drift', *India Today*, 15 September 1983.

29. *Ibid.* 'The speed and confidence with which Assam Chief Minister Saikia has moved during the recent past shows that he is close to being on the top of the situation in the State. Proved (himself) to be most capable and astute leader of the Congress I. In the course of a little over four months he had managed not merely to defuse the highly clogged law and order situation in the State but also to knock its administration back into some shape'. *The Times of India*, editorial, 15 July 1983.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *The Assam Tribune*, 1 March 1983.

32. Gupta, 'Bracing for a Show Down', *India Today*, 15 August 1983, 33-6.

33. *Ibid.*; 'Assam Simmering', 29 February 1984, 43-4.

In fact the Chief Minister was so desperate to acquire legitimacy that he promised to build a 270-km wall along the Assam-Bangladesh border although, according to experts, it would not be possible to wall off even half of it and that too in short stretches. To the same end, he sought Central assistance for the creation of a riverine police force to patrol the vast stretches of the Brahmaputra and the tributaries in the Goalpara and Dhubri districts extending process of detection right into the *char* areas. Unlike his immediate predecessors, Saikia proved his worth in his capabilities of being heard in New Delhi. He succeeded in making the Centre agree to the erection of barbed wire fence along the Indo-Bangladesh border despite stiff opposition of General Ershad at Dacca. Detection and deportation of post-1971 infiltrators demanded formation of Foreigner's Tribunals headed by non-Assamese and non-Bengali officers. The Centre accorded its approval to constitute three-judges tribunals in each of 126 constituencies ; of these 23 immediately and the rest as the work load would be on the increase.³⁴

The legitimacy of Saikia's government depended by and large on the successful functioning of the tribunals. Unfortunately, it was a non-starter. Until January 1994 non-availability of non-Assamese judges rendered it difficult for Saikia to constitute the tribunals. With offer of better pay, perks and 'exhortation of patriotism', he managed only fourteen; of these, reportedly two left without formally taking charges.³⁵ The reasons were not far to seek. They were promised 25 percent of their salary last drawn as special pay, but later told that special pay would not exceed Rs. 300 under the rules. They were to have a car each ; this was reduced to a car for three and that too strictly for official purposes. Again in place of free furnished accommodation they were to stay at Circuit houses away from their families on 'watered *dal* and rice'. 'I know there are difficulties', said Saikia, 'but these are merely administrative and it will take me little time sorting them out.'³⁶ Bureaucratic lapses and red-tapism prevented him from expediting matters nor did he receive necessary co-operation from his Cabinet colleagues, infact, 'he was isolated in his tribunal project'.³⁷ Even Ms Gandhi had to admit that the performance of

34. *Op.Cit.*

35. *Ibid.*, 'Waiting Game', *India Today*, 31 January, 1984, 50-2.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.* Two of his Cabinet Colleagues, Sayeeda Anwara Taimur, Minister Education, and Mahammad Idris, Minister Finance, had been holding out threat of direct action if the tribunals adversely affect in their immigrant-dominated constituencies. Keshab Gogoi, Minister PWD, leader of the dissident's, was making capital of the delay in setting up the tribunals.

the tribunals was far from being satisfactory and Saikia's government was advised to give this the priority it deserved.

The Centre was no less responsible in furnishing in time the guidelines to be followed by the police and the judges in discharging their responsibilities. When these bottlenecks were removed,³⁸ the tribunals suffered from credibility. Under the *Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act 1983* only those who crossed the border after 1971 are foreigners confirming the belief Centre's objective was to impose its own cut off year and that the complainant has to be within a radius of three kms from the suspected foreigner's place of residence. Not unreasonably AASU commented : 'Tribunals have been formed to legitimatise and confirm the foreigners stay in India and not to deport them. We are well aware most of the foreigners live in *char* areas. It will be impossible for any one within 3 km radius of these to complain.'³⁹

Cracks were appearing in the meanwhile in AASU-AAGSP's camp. Following the massacre at Nellie, Muslim constituents of AASU who gave this body a secular character suspected 'a pro-Hindu communal tilt' generated by pro-RSS elements, which would be dangerous to the religious minority.⁴⁰ In his 15 point memoranda, the Vice-President Nurul Hussain sought the removal of Zoiinath Sharma, the Commandant of controversial volunteer force, *Swechcha Sevak Bahini*, severance of all connection with the RSS and BJP and a firm announcement on the definition of a foreigner. Referring to the Nellie and Chawlkhowa killings the memorialist demanded that the AASU supporters not to attend meetings organised by the RSS and BJP.⁴⁰ The allegation was found to be baseless. Nurul Hussain had no answer when he was told that Sharma was not responsible for the killings as he was in jail all through election period when he himself acted as the President.⁴¹ What struck at the root of the leadership was the emergence of the *All Assam Students' Representative*

38. Rules and Guidelines of the IM(DT) Act reached the State government in February 1984 though it came into force earlier on 28 December 1983. Even the official report Tewari Commission comments: 'The procedure was very time consuming and protracted. Another difficulty was of keeping track of the persons detected as illegal immigrants. As there was no provision to detain them, very often they disappeared without leaving any trace and move to some other areas'. *Tewari Commission*. 40-2; also Kakoti, Devakanta, 'Repeal : IMDT Act, 1983'. *The Assam Tribune*, 28 April, 1987.

39. Gupta, 'Assam Simmering', *India Today*, 29 February 1984, 43-4; *The Assam Tribune*, 3-4, March, 1984.

40. *News Item, The Telegraph*, 27 September, 1983.

41. *Ibid.*, 'The Communal Divide', *India, Today*, 15 May 1983,

Union (AASRU), 'a handiwork of the Chief Minister and Congress agents. Formed of 82 elected Union Presidents and General Secretaries of 168 colleges, it challenged AASU's claim to speak on behalf the entire State. 'The present leadership of AASU (elected in 1979) has little moral right to represent...It neither represents All Assam nor is legally unionised.' AASRU had its own demands : 'We only want weightage to be given to the original people (those who have come before 1951) in jobs and in the democratic set up (80%) but let everyone stay on here.'⁴²

The endeavours made by the AASU at the Jorhat Convention, January 1984, to bring about a *rapprochement* and forming an umbrella organisation as a counterpoise to the Congress and pro-immigrant interests proved a failure on conflicting views of the constituents, AJD and PLP*,. The failure of the unity move left no alternative for the AASU leadership but to enter into active politics. 'To tame an elephant, you have to ride an elephant', said an worried Mahanta. 'They were to get off the street and encashing the support that their movement generated in Assam to capture power in Dispur.'⁴³

Soon an opportunity presented itself. After lapse of eighteen months a breakthrough was made on the foreigner's issue. Cabinet Secretary Krishnaswamy Rao Sahib called upon in early 1984 AASU leaders for resumption of talks. Discussions begun in the first week of April and the Defence Minister R. Venkataraman also attended some of the meetings. Basing earlier stand 1965 as the cut off year the Centre wanted those entered the State after 1971 to be identified and disenfranchised for five years. The AASU, though earlier sought to disenfranchise all those who came in after 1961 now being power crazy, climbed down and prepared to accept 1965 as the 'more realistic position', but pressed for disenfranchisement for twenty years. A compromise could have been possible on a ten years basis and the remaining problem could also have been sorted out in case Saikia factor was taken into consideration. Said AASU General Secretary : 'We make it absolutely clear that we will never accept anything till the State Assembly is dissolved. There is no question at all of our recognising it. At the sametime there is no question of our talking to the State government.'⁴⁴

42. Gupta, 'The Electoral Impasse', *India Today*, September 1984, 37.

* PLP wanted to make the movement broad-based with active support and co-operation of the different ethnic groups of the region and this was at variance with AJD with its move to confine it to locals only. The latter, sought to contest election at the earliest and opposed PLP's assertion that there can be no election in case there is a single foreigner in electoral rolls.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Gupta, 'Breaching the Ice', *India Today*, 15 June 1984.

Saikia who made the untiring efforts to win over legitimacy utterly failed and yet he was firm in his belief, 'no matter what the compromise is, there is no possibility of the Assembly or my government being dismissed, Madam has said clearly'.⁴⁵ On the other hand, it was vitally important on the Centre to have peace at any price in view of the disquieting situation in the Punjab and Kashmir and the general election was also not far off. In 1980 'we put off the election in 12 out of 14 Lok Sabha constituencies. It will be a tremendous loss of prestige if Assam were to go more or less unrepresented in the *Lok Sabha* for the third successive time'.⁴⁶

The legitimacy of Saikia government again cropped up in August 1984 when R.K. Trivedi, Chief Election Commissioner, sought to revise and update the 1971 electoral rolls in view of the forthcoming election. In 1971 the total number of voters, it was argued, stood at 63,67,829 which rose to 85,37,497 in 1986. This abnormal rise could not have been possible but for large scale immigration from Bangladesh. The passage of the IM(DT) Act had confirmed that a number of foreigners had found their way into the rolls. The suggestion received the support of the opposition and pro-AASU elements, but worried the Centre as to the fate of Saikia's government elected as it was on 1979 rolls.⁴⁷ Accompanied by eight Cabinet colleagues Saikia rushed to Delhi and in a series of meetings brought home to the Prime Minister that the Commission's move would disenfranchise 23 lakhs voters who might have voted in 1983 on the basis of 1979 electoral rolls. Accusing the CEC in raising up fresh troubles asserted Saikia :

It is Chief Election Commissioner's job to hold election, who is he to solve Assam impasse?... His predecessor Shakhder had started the Assam movement in 1978 by declaring at Utakamund that there were foreigners on electoral rolls and Trivedi now is starting an entirely new problem.⁴⁸

He was given a fitting reply by Trivedi that a return to 1971 would deprive lakhs of voters had no meaning when CEC wanted to use it only

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. Gupta, *op.cit.*, 37.

48. *Ibid.*, *The Assam Tribune*, 29 January 1984.

'as a basic document and prepare new rolls without leaving out any genuine citizen on 1979 rolls. In a subsequent note Saikia suggested that while the election should be hold on 1979 electoral rolls, the 1971 rolls may be used informally as basic document, and unfortunately forty percent of these were then not available.⁴⁹ CEC could not go ahead with the programme of revision of rolls pending final decision of the Centre in this regard, and the latter also dithered as negotiations with the movement leaders was then in progress and narrowed down out to number of years of disenfranchisement of the post-1971 infiltrators.

The talks were renewed in early May 1985 when the movement leaders met on this occasion R.D. Pradhan, the Home Secretary, but the basic approach remained unchanged. AASU representatives were told that the Centre was opposed in principle to the denial of voting right to any one not to speak a million settlers whose disenfranchisement was sought by the leaders of the movement. The parleys bogged down on what would be the cut off date as AASU insisted that it should be should be June 1965, the date when orders prohibiting illegal entry of East Pakistan national was issued whereas the Centre wanted 25 March 1971, the day India and new born Bangladesh entered into an understanding that regulated the flow of migrants across the border.⁵⁰

On the assassination of his mother Ms. Gandhi, 31 October 1984. Rajiv Gandhi came to power. With his carrot and stick policy the Prime Minister was not prepared to concede to the demands of AASU-AAGSP, the dismissal of Saikia Ministry. It had ensured all that the Assamese wanted, security of life and property. On the otherhand a solution of the problem was urgently needed, for the election was only a few months away. In its manifesto Congress-I had made the declaration *inter alia* (i) the party would not insist that 1971 be accepted as the cut off year, (ii) Saikia Ministry would be dissolved the moment an accord was forged and (iii) Election Commissioner would ensure that names of all foreigner's were deleted from the voter's list maintaining 1971 as the base year. To Saikia the dissolution of Assembly was 'the cruelest cut to Congress'. Gracefully he accepted the inevitable with the remark : 'This is a compromise we had to make for the good of the State and the country.'⁵¹

49. *Ibid.*

50. Banerjee, Indranil, 'Prospect of Peace' *India Today*, 31 August 1995.

51. *Ibid.*

Assam Accord and its Aftermath

In early August 1985, to their utter surprise the students leaders were invited for a further talk without any precondition. In the meeting that followed, Centre's proposals were beyond their expectation.¹ That Saikia Ministry would be dissolved provided their demands were reasonable as to the deportation of the foreigners. Hence followed the Assam Accord which was signed in New Delhi on 15 August 1985 by R. D. Pradhan, the Home Secretary and AASU President Prafulla Mahanta and General Secretary Bhriugu K. Phukan. The Centre conceded to the demand for Saikia's removal, pledged to deport immigrants who had settled in Assam after 1971 and disenfranchise 1966-67 migrants for ten years. On the economic and cultural demands, Centre also agreed to set-up another refinery in Assam, establish an Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), a Central University and open Ashok Paper and Silghat Jute Mills. It was virtually a face-saving device. It did not deal with the primary demands : detection, deletion and deportation of foreigners, 1951-70. In their eagerness to seize power they agreed that they would contest election on the basis of electoral rolls prepared in 1971 which they had opposed all along. The condition 1961-71 immigrants would be disenfranchised was immaterial. The accord allowed these people to vote in next election; their properties, trade, business, service remained in tact. In fact the memorandum is a document for regularisation of all pre-1971 foreigners and once for all give the religious minorities a permanent legal status.²

The people of Assam heaved a sigh of relief. Joining hands with the regional parties AASU formed the *Asom Gana Parishad* (AGP) and scored a clear majority in the general election, 1985. The Congress-I got

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1. Banerji, Indranil 'Prospects of Peace,' *India Today*, 15 August 1985, 28.
 2. In spite of it, the Left Front government in West Bengal headed by Jyoti Basu, for reasons of its own, opposed the accord as 'absurd' and had been made in haste against the interest of the linguistic and religious minorities in Assam forgetting that the stream of refugees of 1951-66 who were in doubt about their citizenship had been assured 'regularisation,' and that those who crossed after 1966 till March 1971 would be conferred citizenship in accordance with relative law (*The Assam Tribune*, 15 September, 1984).
For details, *Appendix-C*, also *The Assam Tribune*, 17 August, 1985, see *Memorandum of Settlement*, also 18 and 20 August, 1985; *The Telegraph*, 20, 22, 28, 30 August 1985. *The Telegraph* (22 August) estimates more than 80 percent of 2.4 million refugees who settled in Assam since 1941 without citizenship had been regularised.

barely twenty five seats. It is for the first time, to the great jubilation of the people, the reins of government passed under the control of a regional party of a batch of youths on an average a little over thirty.

The task before the young leadership was extremely formidable and bristled with too many difficulties. Said a sober Mahanta: 'It is very tough, much tougher than we had thought, people want us to do more than we can hardly do'. He had to confront with the *United Minority Front (UMF)* under fiery A.F.A. Golam Osmani, ex-Minister and Secretary UMF, who threatened to launch a movement in minority areas to prevent the implementation of the Accord (*Vide Appendix D*), each clause of which is full of poison'. If Hiteswar Saikia had the problem of finding legitimacy in ethnic Assamese, AGP leadership had a similar problem in minority pockets of Goalpara, Dhubri and Barak Valley districts of Cachar and Karimganj.³ The case was otherwise with the Assamese Muslim who had common heritage with the Hindus for ages past. 'Look out the window', said AGP, M.P. Aatur Rahmam, pointing out at the bank of the Brahmaputra from his hilltop house. 'It was somewhere here that Bagh Hazarika, a Muslim commander, joined force with the Assamese Hindus to defeat the Mughals.' Even Rahman admitted that of late communities have drifted apart. 'The Muslims are like sly horse. They want to come but cannot decide'.⁴

Conciliation with the minorities was the watchword of the AGP government. 'Those who had voted for us already belong to us. Now we have to reach out to other Indian citizens who have doubts about our intentions.' Consequently, the implementation of the accord had become much more than an administrative problem, nay 'an apple of discord'. The Home Minister Bhrigu Phukan of course wanted to expedite the process as this was the 'only reason we came to power, we just cannot afford to fail the people.' In the post-1971 period, according to AGP, Assam had at least two million infiltrators, and in addition over a million migrants in 1966-71 stream which had been disfranchised by the accord. Over and above lakhs of encroachers had occupied reserved forests and tribal belts. Any attempt at deportation of the aliens or eviction of the encroachers would give rise to uproar even violence creating thereby a law and order problem.⁵ Therefore, AGP had to hasten slowly the process of

3. Gupta, 'Youthful take over,' *India Today*, 15 January 1986, 36f.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, 'Endangered Accord,' *India Today*, Special Report, 15 March 1986, 64f.

implementation of the accord despite creation of a full-fledged department with an IAS Secretary at its head. The higher ups at Dispur were also at a loss to tackle the problem when immigrants were detected and tried at the tribunal in larger numbers. On pressing demands of the AASU the State government had prepared a draft amendment to the IM(DT) Act, but reconstitution of the tribunals continued to pose a difficult problem. Of the twenty, then in existence, with just thirty judges instead of sixty the AGP had to abandon the idea of constituting one in each of the 126 constituencies. 'Ultimately we have to see what is practicable and possible, ours is a situation walking the tight rope over the swollen Brahmaputra.' ⁶ The question relating to rehabilitation of the *swahids* (martyrs) was no less embarrassing. The total number of martyrs was calculated at about six hundred. The leadership was told that under constitutional norms the relief measures were not to be confined to martyrs, but extended to all those who suffered during movement in thousands demanding no less than a hundred crore which was beyond the capacity of the State government to provide at a time when its debt repayment exceeded the revenue receipt. ⁷

Non-cooperation of the Congress I government at the Centre was no less responsible for non-implementation of the accord and ultimate failure of the AGP government. No attempt whatever was made to repeal the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act 1983, which envisages primary investigation by the police in case of a suspected foreigner and a subsequent reference to a three-judges tribunal. Police complained that the Act does not empower them either to arrest or to extract information from immigrants. Moreover, under Foreigner's Act 1946 applicable elsewhere, the *onus* of proof lies on the suspect whereas under the IM(DT) Act on the complainant. The AGP not unreasonably said that the Act had been deliberately designed not to deport but to make permanent the Bangladeshis as 'vote bank' to Congress I. The border fence which was assured had been suspended; the Centre was reluctant to create fencing when its hands were full with the Punjab and Kashmir issues. Even the construction of a road and fence along the border was abandoned as Bangladesh Rifle patrol threatened the surveyors near Dhubri on western border. The Centre also failed to provide the additional force that had been promised to detect foreigners and the State had to spend eighteen crores to maintain a Police Force of three hundred. ⁸

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. Menon, 'Failed Accord' *India Today*, 31 October 1987.

AGP leadership, immature and inexperienced as they were, utterly failed to show administrative acumen and political sagacity in tackling the burning issues of the State. In their utmost zeal for cleansing operation replacing pro-Congress bureaucracy by supporters of their own, as many as twenty-one civil officers had been transferred not sparing the Chief Secretary, Ms. P. P. Trivedi, an officer of ripe experience and exemplary integrity, demoralizing thereby senior officers compelling many to seek transfer to Delhi. 'We are currently short of people and are seeking the return of our officers from Delhi', confessed J.P. Rajkhowa, the Secretary of the Personnel department. How can that be possible when a senior civil officer had to function 'with a Minister who is guided by the advice of minor clerks and cyclostyling machine operators belonging to the *Karamachari Parishad* which was in the vanguard of the Assam movement'.⁹ Consequently, there had been a total repudiation of the rules and administrative norms in favour of partymen and favourites and unblushing corruption though AGP took office with solemn promise 'to root out corruption and provide a clean and efficient government.'¹⁰ *New York Times* correspondent rightly observes:

From spartan life-styles gained from living in the University hostels where food was cheap and not particularly tasty, the bachelors developed a taste for high life. Many of them got married quickly. Their wedding receptions were lavish and talked about because of the large number of expensive gifts bestowed on the couples. One Minister got as many as dozen refrigerators and an equal number of television sets from businessmen...he neither had the grace or common sense to return any of these gifts which can be considered as bribes to a public servant under existing laws.¹¹

The AASU-AAGSP, which had been vigilant watch-dog of the performance of the government, found to their utter disappointment that the pace of detection and deportation was hopelessly slow. Until March 1988, out of 3,442 detected only 156 deported. Allegations were made of rampant corruption of AGP leadership, of hollow promises made, tribal unrest, Naga encroachments, of failure to evolve permanent solution of recurrence of floods, of job-oriented education and so on. The hope of

9. Gupta, 'Bureaucracy Under Attack,' *India Today*, 15 December 1986, 34; *The Assam Tribune*, 27 December 1985.

10. *The Assam Tribune*, 7 December 1985

11. Hazarika, *op. cit.*, 150-51.

peace, progress and prosperity entertained by the people ended in bitter disappointment. In their views there is little to choose between the Congress I and AGP government.¹² 'We have gone slow', said AASU President, 'as we do not want our student missing classes once again. But we are (now) left with no other alternative.' AASU had already revived the agitation by a call of *Satyagraha* on 14 February 1984 demanding detection and expulsion of all illegal foreigners.¹³ Towards the close of 1986, in protest against Centre's non-implementation of the accord, it started a *dharna* at the boat club, New Delhi, and threatened to follow it up with a hunger strike. This was followed by a blockade from the oil fields in Assam to the refineries of Guwahati, Bongaigaon and Barauni. The blockade was not popular as in 1980 and lifted after sixty hours; otherwise there would have been another crisis in oil throughout north-east India.¹⁴

The clause on the cultural, linguistic and social identity of the Assamese presented the most formidable problem. After prolonged discussion in a top-level meeting of the Ministers and senior officials over the definition of the 'Assamese people', a new language policy was laid down making it mandatory for services under the government to learn Assamese. This was stoutly opposed by the non-Assamese, particularly by *All Assam Tribal Students' Union* (AATSU), Collecting leaders as many as of 67 organisations, Ranauj Pegu, firebrand AATSU, challenged : What do they mean by Assamese and culture? What happened to the culture and language of the tribes and backward classes? They resolved to resist any attempt to 'thrust' Assamese on the tribesmen. (*Vide Appendix E*). In 1987 in a memorandum to the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, *Karbi Autonomous Council Demand Committee*¹⁵ complained: 'The present leaders of Assam made no secret of their determination to wipe out the distinct language, culture and tradition.'¹⁶

The anti-foreigners agitation, though basically a movement of the Assamese elite, identity of interests led the PTCA, and several tribal organisations to join hands with AASU-AAGSP. A classmate of Prafulla Mahanta, Upen Brahma was an active member of the organisation.

12. Menon, 'Widening Rift,' *India Today*, 31 March 1988, 49.

13. *The Assam Tribune*, 15 Feb 1984.

14. Menon, *op. cit.*

15. Gupta, 'Endangered Accord;' *op. cit.*

16. *Infra.*, 101

Problem arose when on signing of Accord (15 August 1985) Brahma demanded his pound of flesh, the implementation of the clause 10: 'The existing law would be strictly enforced to prevent illegal occupation of tribal belts and blocks and those occupying tribals lands would be evicted.' The task was not an easy one, but it could have been tactfully handled by Mahanta by taking Brahma into his confidence and meeting other demands of the tribals. The rigid stand which the leadership took on this and other issues left no alternative for Brahma but to sever connection with AGP government.¹⁷

Allegations had been made that the Congress I government at the Centre used the Boro leadership to embarrass the AGP government at Dispur. Rajiv Gandhi is said to have warned the Chief Minister that unless the Assam government solve the Boro problem, there would be no alternative for the Union government but to dismiss AGP and impose President's Rule in Assam.¹⁸ Reportedly Assam Chief Minister Mahanta in a Press Conference complained that the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) played an important rôle by imparting arms and explosive training to Boro militants to destabilize the government and that no less than the Minister of State for Home S.M. Dev had a secret hand in this regard. The National Front government under V.P. Singh later stopped the activities of the RAW when evidence was found of its involvement.¹⁹ To exploit the situation to his advantage, the Minister of the State for Home, during his frequent visits to Assam, made 'scathing criticisms' of the functioning of the AGP government which had adversely affected its fortune at a time when the election was round the corner.

It was no small compliment to Mahanta that he rose up to the occasion. Declaring that he had failed to live up to the expectation of the people, he tendered his resignation asking his Cabinet colleagues to defend individually against the charges of corruption. Articulate Bhrigu followed suit with a statement that he was greatly disillusioned and deeply

17. Hazarika, *op. cit.*, 156f.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, Ferzand Ahmed, 'Assam: A Bloody Price,' *India Today*, 15 September 1989, 53. Finding himself cornered S. M. Dev is reported to have tried not only to defend himself but also the RAW which was accused of providing 'increasing sustenance' to the Bodo militants. On the otherhand, an organisation of RAW employees complained to Rajiv Gandhi that they were made to carry out 'operation Zoom Zoom' with a budget of three crores aimed at destabilising AGP government. Prabhakar, M. S., 'A Clandestine Outfit,' *Frontline*, 18 June 1983, 37f.

pained to see some of his young colleagues were interested only in making money. Following a meeting of the AGP Legislature Party five Cabinet and other Ministers resigned. The strength of the Ministry was reduced to twenty three from twenty eight.²⁰ The 'cleansing operation' was an attempt to assuage the feelings of AASU and no less to demonstrate that the AGP had the will and courage to punish those who erred. Nonetheless, AGP rule was a catalogue of failures. It could not maintain the composite identity of the Assamese. It could satisfy none: Boros, Karbis, minorities and finally Assamese. Assamese nationality has been 'riven by tribal ethnic and caste rivalries as it had been never before'. 'You talk of Kashmir and the Punjab²¹', said ex-Chief Minister Sarat Chandra Sinha: 'this will be much worse. Every one will be at every one else's' throat.'²¹

It is indeed an irony of fate that those who were in the vanguard of a peaceful movement turned before long into a group of 'gun-toting, dreaded underground militants' namely the *United Liberation Front of Assam* (ULFA). Apparently this was the outcome of AGP government's dismal failure to deliver the goods. In reality, it was an expression of opposition to more than hundred years of exploitation of the colonial rulers and Indian government. They had the firm conviction that AASU's agitation against immigrants would not work and that a long term solution was needed and that New Delhi would not listen to *satyagraha* but more militant voice. They dreamt of

Swadhin Asom where scientific socialism could be the way of life and where its material resources would be exploited for the benefit of its own people: all its people including the immigrants and not to the benefit of unscrupulous power elites in New Delhi.²²

In spite of her vast potentialities, in human, natural and mineral, it cannot be denied, economically Assam is one of the most backward State in India. Per capita income of Assam is to be calculated from the bottom and consumption of electricity is lowest (69KW in 1994-95) in the

20. Menon in Guwahati, 'Fighting Back,' *India Today*, 15 March 1988, 56.

21. Sengupta, Prasanta, 'Asom Gana-Parishad: Accession to Power in Assam: Problems and Prospects,' *Assam Studies* 7(i); Shekhar Gupta and Uttam Sengupta, 15 September 1989, 38.

22. Deka, *Ulfar Swadhin Asom* (in Assamese) Dispur; Das Samir Kumar, *ULFA*, Chapt. ii; Hazarika, Sanjoy, *Strangers of the Mist*, 168f; In this racy style the author has presented a reliable account of the activities of the militants from diverse sources including interviews with some hard-cores.

country. This has been attributed, and rightly so, to the utter neglect and step-motherly treatment of those at the helm of affairs in Delhi. Complaints had been made of exploitation of resources by taking out raw materials to feed industries elsewhere, of employment of outsiders specially in key-posts and total neglect of development in transport, communication, power, education and social services.^{22a} True, without-agitation and continuous agitation Assam did not have her University, a bridge over the Brahmaputra, broad-gauge railway line, refinery and a gas-cracker plant. For their lack of knowledge and adequate information, the National parties, some sympathetic, could not support her cause. Her MPs, barring a few, were neither vocal nor posted with facts to assert Assam's rightful claims. The crux of the problem was whether at a time of globalization when people are getting closer together, will it be desirable and possible to remain in isolation for a State dependent, by and large, on outsiders not only for manpower, skilled and unskilled, but even essential foodstuff? What is guarantee that *Swadhin Asom* will not be the victim of aggression of her greedy neighbours or revert to the anarchy and misrule on the eve of British occupation? Is it not the manifestation of the growing frustration of the Assamese youths, educated and uneducated, and the remedy lies not in secession but in removal of the causes that led to a sense of deprivation and alienation?

According to police sources, initially, the hard-core consisted of sixty to seventy persons; some of them being earlier members of extremist *Asom Jatiyatabadi Chatra Juva Parisad* (AJYCP) who were involved the cases of sabotage and bomb-blasts all over the Valley of the Brahmaputra. It had its origin in April 1979 at Sibsagar under the Chairmanship of Arabinda Rajkhowa who led the *Parishad* and played a significant rôle in the anti-foreigner's movement. The other key figures were Golap Barua (Anup Chetia) Samiran Gogoi and Paresh Barua with his able lieutenants, Hirakjyoti Mahanta and Chakra Gohain. ULFA was strengthened by the

22 a Barua, K., *Critical Years of Assam*, 97f. No less an authority than the eminent economist and Chairman, NEDFI, Jayanta Madhab remarks : 'Between August 1991 and December 1994 Rs. 345,000 crores worth of project memoranda were signed. Out of which were for Maharashtra Rs. 67,958 crore and Gujrat Rs. 59,708 crore. For Assam the amount was Rs. 1038 crore... All India Financing Institutions followed the same trend. In 1994-5 AF's sanctioned Rs. 57,792 crore, out of which Maharashtra received Rs. 13,727 crore, Gujrat 10,125 crore... Assam 1.36 crore... In a federal Structure with wide economic disparities amongst its constituent States, the Central government bear the responsibility of ensuring a reasonable level to inter-regional equality'. *The Indian Express; Business Feature*, 23 November 1996, 3.

joining of Munin Nabis of *The Assam Liberation Army*, now defunct, which had its net-work at Barpeta, Mangaldoi and Nagaon. Paresh Barua, Commander-in-Chief, and some hard-cores went to Imphal and contacted the NSCN to work out training programme by their guerrillas at the Myanmar hideouts. They had arms and training initially from the *Kachin Liberation Army* (KLA), but the distance and difficulties of the terrain and the activities of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) made them to turn to NSCN camp near Indo-Myanmar border. For arms and training the ULFA had to meet pressing demands of the KLA and NSCN for which they committed 'daring robberies' at Guwahati and elsewhere. Naturally businessman, contractors and tea-gardens had been their targets.²³ 'Even ULFA was surprised', writes Hazarika, 'by the swiftness with which the State abdicated its responsibility and businessmen succumbed to pressure. A simple telephone threat, the display of weapons by tough-looking militants ... or even an occasional roughing up was enough to help local traders part with millions of rupees'.²⁴

The AGP government had to confront with ULFA militants whose writ ran unchallenged throughout the Valley of Brahmaputra. They openly erected military camps at strategic locations in Upper Assam. So deep-rooted was the fear of ULFA, even Cabinet Ministers had not the courage to speak against it. It is believed there was no distinction between AASU, AGP and ULFA. When an ULFA suspect was arrested, AASU declared a *bandh* while the AGP leadership would secure his release from police custody*. AGP leadership, or a section of it, was likely to have close connection with the extremists.²⁵ This may not be a serious concern; what

23. Deka, *op. cit.*

24. Not unoften ULFA got more than what they wanted. 'we realised,' said a militant : 'How soft the State was, how weak the businessmen were, how much black money they could pay up and have enough for themselves.' The 'war chest' was kept with businessmen, government officers, police and contractors. In case any protest made, they were told 'their corruption would be exposed publicly and, they would be severely dealt with.' Hazarika, *op. cit.* 185-7.

* Infact, AASU's relationship with ULFA was 'ambiguous.' It had little faith on 'Swadhin Asom,' but demanded 'Self determination' within the framework of Indian Constitution. It spoke highly of the integrity and honesty of ULFA as they 'wish the Assamese well' and intend to do good to the country as well as to the people and the circumstances have forced them 'to chart out a separate line.' Das, Samir Kumar, *ULFA*, 40.

25. 'Though AGP leaders stoutly opposed,' said Union Minister of State Santosh Mohan Dev, 'there is a general feeling throughout Assam that AGP government is directly and indirectly connected with ULFA activities.' In early May 1990 when the English Daily *The Sentinel* commented on ULFA's link with AGP, the Chief Minister reportedly made an assault on the local press which led to a week long boycott by the journalists; Ferzand Ahmed, 'Electoral Entanglement,' *India Today*, 15 May, 1990, 35.

really affected the course of events was their utter lack of governance and infighting which ULFA deftly used to its advantage. Apart from rampant corruption, nepotism and abuse of power, the leaders were hurling charges one against another. The Chief Minister Mahanta and the Home Minister Phukan were at 'loggerheads'. The latter is reported to have resigned thrice when the Chief Minister accused him of being 'hand in glove' with the ULFA.²⁶ With their ego and immaturity the young leadership totally failed to realise that they were digging their own graves and paving the way for the restoration of Congress rule in Assam.

The ULFA hit the headlines as the result of a spate of killings numbering over a hundred. They liquidated Utsavananda Goswami for his alleged involvement in Gohpur killings (1983, 1989) and E.S. Parthasarathi, Assistant Commissioner, Jorhat, as he assisted in holding election which the ultras considered 'illegal'. The earliest victim was of course Kalipada Sen, President UMF (15 September 1986). This was followed by the assassination of the President Kamrup Chambers of Commerce, Giridharilal Harlalka, (15 March 1988) and his Secretary Sankar Birmiwal (20 January 1990), not because they were Marwaris, but they 'remained oblivious to social responsibilities'. ULFA gunned down Daulat Singh Negi, S.P., Dibrugarh, (29 July 1990) and well known Surendra Paul, Chairman, Assam Frontier Tea Company, for allegedly dismissing Assamese employees from his gardens.²⁷

Extortions and killings notwithstanding, ULFA had supporters of a section of the intellectuals and rural people for the obvious reason under the *Jatiya Unnayan Parishad*,²⁸ they undertook measures of social reform and economic development: Combining Robin Hood tactics, punishing corruption, fighting Rhino-poaching, conducting anti-liquor and anti-gambling campaigns, taking stern action against those in molesting women and encouraging prostitution with non-Assamese as their target of attack the ULFA, cadres had been able to spread their influences in Assam.²⁹ Under the six-point code of conduct they sought to create a healthy educational environment preventing students from adopting unfair means and 'wiping out perverted mentality.' The Parishad utilised

26. Gupta with Uttam Sengupta, 'A violent Mess,' *India Today*, 15 September 1990; 38f.; Hazarika, *op. cit.* 190, 211.

27. Deka, *op. cit.*, 115, 122-5; Charvak, 'Rise of ULFA in Assam,' *Mainstream*, 21 April, 1990, 2, 35; Hazarika, *op. cit.*

28. Das, Mihir Kumar, *op. cit.* 188; Deka, *op. cit.*, 20-24.

29. Charvak, *op. cit.*

government land and resources and made their employees to work on the roads and embankments at times 'under supervision of an ULFA girl with a stengun in her shoulders'.³⁰

The situation drifted from bad to worse. The militants who held the tea-gardens in Upper Assam to ransom made demands of 'protection money' on the ground the planters had taken away the produce of Assam without any investment. The managers and owners had to oblige the militants with their demands since the AGP government had utterly failed to afford them the protection they greatly needed. When the *Indian Tea-Planters Association* met the Chief Minister on receipt of the letter from ULFA, the latter told them in no uncertain terms 'that they were on their own and that the government could do little to bail them out.'³¹ In May 1990, on the plea of 'Economic development', huge demands were reported to have been made on Tata Tea, MacLeod Russell, MacNeil Magor and all paid, but Unilever, having seven gardens in the Doomdooma region, referred the matter to the higher authorities in London. When the affairs of the company was brought to the notice of the Indian High Commissioner Kuldeep Nayar, eminent journalist, the latter sent urgent message to New Delhi to take 'tough line' against the militants. It provided Chandra Shekhar, who had then unseated V.P. Singh as Prime Minister, 'solid reason' to take stringent measures against ULFA. This was followed by the dismissal of AGP government in November 1990 and at the same time ULFA was outlawed. The *Operation Bajrang* moved on under Lieutenant General Ajai Singh of the Western Command against the militants in Upper Assam.³²

So strong was the intelligence of the millitants that they received timely information to take precautionary measures before the arrival of the troops. Most of the hideouts that the army claimed to have dismantled were already deserted and weapons and materials carried away. They noticed at Lakhpathar, a few miles off Digboi, in the midst of jungles, a mass grave with decomposed bodies 'as concrete evidence of the brutalities of the militants'. Arabinda Rajkhowa, the Chairman and some militants shifted to nearby training camp at Saraipung and thence to Meghalaya *en route* to Bangladesh. A section of the hard-core was demoralised who felt

30. Hazarika, *op. cit.*, 194f.; Shekhar Gupta and Uttam Sengupta, *op. cit.*

31. *Ibid.*, 196-8, 200-2.

32. *Ibid.*; Deka, *op. cit.*, 149-50, 156.

it to be impossible to have confrontation with the Army unless backed by foreign powers inimical to India. 'For the Army *Bajrang* operation turned out to be something dampner because there was no resistance at all'³³ They rounded up suspects out of their homes and took them into their camp for interrogation. The early operations resulted in capture of about five hundred militants supposed to be informants. Soon the soldiers had to return to their barracks; preparation were set on foot for the general election. Army brass were greatly annoyed. They felt their job was yet to be over. ULFA was not interested in the election as they had no faith in an 'exploitative' Indian democracy. Nonetheless it afforded the militant outfits the opportunity 'to re-establish links with its cadres, boost the morale of its supporters and forge a new strategy to battle Dispur and Delhi'.³⁴

The breach between Mahanta and Phukan widened into an yawning gulf. It gave birth to a new party, *Natun Asom Gana Parishad* (NAGP), led by Bhrigu Phukan. The split cleared the path for the Congress I to have the majority in the election of 1991 with the backing of the Muslims, Bengalis and some tribals. Though 'cold shouldered and distrusted', redoubtable Hiteswar Saikia once again formed the government. Hardly had he been sworn in on 30 June when the militants kidnapped the Secretary, General Administrative Department (GAD) and fourteen executives of the OIL and Natural Gas Commission including Soviet engineer Gritchenko Sergei. The ULFA bargained that hostage would be released if twenty four of its cadre were freed from prison. Sergei was killed 'as he could not be subdued by threats or physical intimidation'.³⁵

In a meeting of the intellectuals in which this writer was also present Saikia indicated that the policy of the government towards the militants would be one of moderation. But it degenerated into an appeasement when he offered amnesty to all the prisoners and released forthwith 404 and cleared the deck for another batch of 101. To Prakash Singh, Director General of Police, the action of the Chief Minister was 'hasty', nay 'a humiliating sell out'. In utter disgust and despair he got his transfer to his home State, Uttar Pradesh. Unilateral surrender had been 'shot in arms' of the ULFA and in any case it was a risky gamble. The outlawed militants refused to release the hostages unless ULFA detainees numbering 184

33. Uttām Sengupta, 'Assam: State of Strife' *India Today*, 31 December, 1990, 23

34. *Ibid.*, Said Siddhartha Phukan, 'we would never participate in election under the under the Indian framework. Nor would we ask people to boycott election,' cited in Ferzand Ahmed, 'Assam Electoral Entanglement', *India Today*, 15 May, 1990, 36.

35. Hazarika, *op. cit.*, 212-13; Deka, *op. cit.*, 215-16, 219.

were set free in phases. Saikia had no alternative but to be a hardliner. Activists were told that no more detinue would be released unless all the hostages were set free. The militants assumed offensive; killings and extortions followed not sparing even Congress I workers. Nonetheless Saikia kept alive the option of dialogue.³⁶

The failure of the negotiations over the hostage issue and the killings of ONGC officials, Sergei and later T.S. Raju, sparked off nation-wide protests. Oil engineers went on strike and refused to work unless their friends were released and security ensured. The Centre and Saikia's government had to abandon the search for a negotiated settlement and to revert to military crackdown. Lieutenant General Ajay Singh was recalled and the *Operation Rhino* rolled on in September 1991. Even, then Assam Chief Minister talked of 'peace and moderation'; holding discussions with the opposition and a cross section of the people. He exchanged three of his hostages for twenty one of twenty four detenués and even declared general amnesty for the militants. In spite of moderation when the ULFA demanded unconditional release of all those arrested during *Bajrang Operation* Saikia had to be tough : 'I am prepared for surrendering 6 hostages for the sake of 2.2 crore people and the integrity of the nation.'³⁷ In fact ULFA wanted to use the hostages as a bargaining counter and to bring down Saikia's government that it had failed to provide security to the people. They were outwitted by his skillful manoeuvring within the militant organisation and successful operation of the Army under Ajay Singh. Kuldip Nayar tells us,

The ULFA think-tank some of whose members I met, admit that violence is not the way out. This is on the run and its middle leaders have been practically eliminated. Sixteen camps have been destroyed and 1000 people arrested. An assortment of about weapons 4000 in all have been captured.³⁸

Of the top-level leadership, the Army authorities were not slow to capture alive operation Commander Manoj Hazarika and liaison officers Andrew Giri and Bhaskar Barua. In Calcutta arrests were made of the

36. Deka, *Ibid.*; Banerjee, Ruben, 'Move Misfires,' *India Today*, 15 August 1991, 55.

37. Ferzand Ahmed with Kaveri Raamjai, 'Temporary Truce', *India Today*, 15 January 1992, 32f.

38. Nayar, 'Waiting for Peace in Assam,' *The Statesman*, 6 November 1991; Prabhakara, 'Dangerous game, on ULFA's Scheme,' *Frontline*, 8 May 1992, 38f.

General Secretary Golap Barua *alias* Anup Chetia and three others of rank: Prabhat Barua, Raj Barua and his wife Jolley. Then followed the apprehension of the Vice-President Pradip Gogoi, Sunil Nath and Kalpañyoti Neog. On the New Year's eve the arrest and shooting of the hard-liner and Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Hirañyoti Mahanta shattered ULFA's dream of *Swadhin Asom* and hastened Chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa to make overtures for a settlement. In his secret letter to the Prime Minister he agreed, subject to the ratification of the Central Committee, to accept a solution within the framework of the Indian Constitution, to abjure violence and the surrender of arms at an appropriate time. He of course urged the Prime Minister to remove the ban on the organisation, to end army operation and use of sweeping powers of arrest and detention under the Armed Disturbed Areas Act and the Armed forces (Special Powers) Act.³⁹

Preparation for a breakthrough was made in fact on February 1, 1991 when the General Publicity Secretary Siddhartha Phukan *alias* Sunil Nath 'on behalf of the Central Council ULFA' addressed to the Governor Devidas Thakur soliciting removal of the President's rule to create a favourable climate to hold discussion. In early January 1992, the ULFA took the initiative with the release of the remaining hostages and its 'total and indefinite ceasefire'. The negotiations carried on both in Delhi and Dispur paved the way for the talk on 12 January 1992. High officials of the Ministry of Home and Cabinet Secretary apart, the meeting was attended by the Assam Chief Minister and a delegation of five headed by the General Secretary Anup Chetia of the United Liberation Front of Assam.⁴⁰ The Prime Minister was assured that the insurgents would formally end violence and sought a solution within the framework of Indian Constitution and in return Prime Minister would suspend army operations and the ULFA would have to surrender arms and get necessary clearance from the Central Council for the accord and surrendering the militants. Hiteswar Saikia was advised by the Home Minister S.B. Chavan 'to create an atmosphere conducive to facilitating process of future negotiations' though he had grave doubts as to the bonafides of the ULFA leaders. They had carried on talks in Delhi, he thought, to get concessions, release of leaders and withdrawal of *Operation Rhino* as they had done when *Operation Bajrang* was 'too hot' for them. He wanted that talk

39. *Ibid.*, Hazarika, 220f.

40. Ferzand Ahmed, *op. cit.*

should be conditional to cadres surrendering arms and expressing faith in the government.⁴¹

Hiteswar Saikia was no less sceptical as to the true motives of the militants. He was not oblivious of the fact that while bargaining was on ULFA had killed three hostages. He had also misgivings that like its peace offer after *Operation Bajrang* it would be just 'a tactical retreat in a war of attrition'. All the more, not less than 500 trained and heavily armed militants were then at large and beyond the reach of the Army. These fears and calculations prompted the Chief Minister to reject the suggestion made by the opposition on the eve of *Panchayat* election of the previous year to ease army's hold on the militants. Saikia's views received the concurrence of the army authorities not to stop operations then in progress.⁴²

A deadlock ensued. No meeting of the Central Council was held to endorse the assurance given by the Chairman Rajkhowa to the Prime Minister on January 1 nor of the five members delegation of the Delhi talks on January 12. Lieutenant General Ajay Singh was the first to sense a 'vertical' split between the hardliners and moderates.⁴³ The leaders of the five district units-Kamrup, Barpeta, Sonitpur, Jorhat and Lakhimpur-being tired of insurgency decided to endorse the Delhi talks and come out in favour of the dialogue that began on January 12. As many as eighteen (?) of these members formally met the Chief Minister and senior officials on 31 March. In a statement denouncing the top leaders, then in Bangladesh, for their failure to give proper guidance, they reaffirmed the commitments already made and decided to start direct negotiations with the government.⁴⁴ The most delicate task of persuading the hard-core after Delhi talks devolved on the 'trinity': Chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa, Vice-Chairman Pradip Gogoi and General Secretary Anup Chetia. They failed in their mission. The hard-core clung fast to their ultimate goal *Swadhin Asom* and viewed the talks 'as a continuation of the struggle in another form'. They condemned split in the cadre and expelled the dissidents from primary membership of the organisation. The action of the Chairman was

41. *Ibid.*, 'Breaking through,' *India Today*, 31 August 1992; 71; Prabhakara, *op. cit.* ; Hazarika, *op. cit.* 222-3.

42. *Ibid.*, 'Temporary Truce,' *India Today*, 15 January 1992, 32-3.

43. *The Statesman*, 24 September 1991.

44. Hazarika, *op. cit.* 226-7. Deka, 28f.

denounced by the Commander-in-Chief Paresh Barua, then in Bangladesh,⁴⁵ as 'unacceptable sell out'. A section of the militants resolved not to abandon the path of struggle adopting tactics according to the exigencies of the situation. Of the 'trinity', Chetia and Gogoi, who had been maintaining close links with Delhi disappeared, perhaps left for Bangladesh. Rajkhowa being pressurised by Paresh Barua had no option but to make a *volte-face* and left for Bangladesh with two followers to assure Barua that they had not 'sold out' to ensure their 'political survival and physical well-being'.⁴⁶

A past master in art of politics, Saikia was not slow to take full advantage of the split. He outwitted the militants though at a heavy cost—loss of his own brother, two nephews and himself number one in hit-list. His skilful manoeuvring succeeded in surrender of over three thousand militants and most of these apparently joined the mainstream. Saikia's rapport with the Centre enabled him to procure over a crore for rehabilitation : half of it to be utilised in a police battalion to fight the insurgents and the rest to be expended on the cadres. In case the task of rehabilitation of surrendered militants, SULFA as they were called, was done in a planned manner duly monitored by an official agency, the energies of these misguided youths could have been fruitfully utilised in the larger interest of the community. SULFA boys were given soft loans and cars besides facilities to earn as P.W.D. contractors, government suppliers, commission agents for sale essential commodities (coal, fish, eggs, vegetables)*. The result had been, as *The Home-Link* observes⁴⁷ (editorial):

the people of Assam have witnessed (during the last few years)...a repudiation of the rule of law, a total rejection of hard, assiduous study and skills towards earning a honest living,...option of criminal

45. *Ibid.*,

46. Hazarika, *op. cit.*, 222; Ferzand Ahmed, 'Break Through' *India Today*, 31 August, 1992; Prabhakara, 'Dangerous games,' *Frontline*, 8 May, 1992, 38-9.

47. Editorial, *The Home-Link*, 4 June 1995.

* Commonly known as *goonda-tax*, these levies were payable by the wholesalers at Fancy Bazar, Guwahati, to the ULFA boys with the full knowledge of the police and the government. Prices of several articles had been increased which were additional burdens to the consumers indirectly imposed by the government. *The Sentinel*, 7 July 1995. *Dainik Asom*, 13 June. 1995.

unlawful ways of securing short-cuts to five-star life-style, and a total isolation of a sizeable section of youth from their society in terms of productive and socially useful activities.

Admittedly, the government had no option but to bring the militants back to the mainstream. But there is no reason to pardon all the convicts of their past crimes and permitting them to retain their 'clandestine' arms which they not unoften used in intimidating, kidnapping and even committing violent crimes. What is most deplorable 'the authorities are sending wrong signals to the youths that they should all give up studies and grab a gun so as to be rewarded a year after having looted, kidnapped and killed.'

Quest for Identity

Assam is in ferment and turmoil. While ULFA militants had been demanding *swadhin* Asom, autonomous demands of different ethnic groups—Boros, Karbis, Dimasas, Koch-Rajbanshis, Rabha-Hasongs, Tiwas, Misings—had caused serious concern to the authorities at Dispur and New Delhi. A sense of neglect and deprivation had created a crisis of identity or identity consciousness amongst different ethnic groups of the Valley of the Brahmaputra. Separatist tendencies were discernible even of the Tai-Ahoms who had ruled the valley for six centuries and who made unique contributions to integrating multi-racial and multi-lingual ethnic groups into a greater Assamese society. At the close of the last century a section of the Ahom elite condemned the colonial rulers in following a discriminatory policy against the Ahoms in matters of employment and depriving them of the economic benefits allowing the high caste Assamese Hindus dominant positions in the government.¹ Students of history are well aware that political reasons made it necessary for the early British rulers to appoint the ex-official aristocracy to their hereditary offices. When the latter proved themselves utterly incompetent, mention has already been made, ‘man of rank’ had to be replaced by ‘man of ability and business’² from the neighbouring districts of Bengal. Like the Muslims in the upper provinces, the Ahoms failed to take advantage of the English education,³ the passport to government jobs, and consequently non-

1. Phukon, Girin, ‘Search for Tai-Ahom Identity in Assam’ *NEIHA*, 1990, 304f.

2. *Supra*, 34-5.

A perusal of Mill’s Report (1854) on Assam will reveal ‘men of rank not necessarily of worth’ occupied most of the lower court justice and revenue administration. Even in 1853 ‘native of respectability’ enjoyed as many as 17 posts of Munsiffs, 7 Sadar Amins and one Principal Sadar Amin at different stations of the province (para 145-50).

3. The English schools at Gauhati (1835) and Sibsagar (1840) were started to impart instructions to the Assamese youths, particularly sons and wards of the ex-nobility, to train them up to take up positions of trust and responsibility under the government. ‘When the upper classes in Assam will perceive’, wrote the Commissioner of Assam, ‘there is no other road than through the attainments superior information and the means of procuring it for their children is put within their reach, they will not allow to be superseded by those of the inferior ranks’: *Bengal political proceedings* 1834, 10 July No. 211; Jenkins, 21 June.

Assamese, not the high caste Hindus, continued their predominant influence in the government. The economy of Assam, too, passed under the control of outsiders and the Assamese, the Ahoms inclusive, apart from being apathetic and indolent, had neither the capital nor expertise so necessary for the success of commercial and industrial activities.

In 1893, there had emerged the *Ahom Association* (later *Sabha*) under the leadership of eminent literateur P.N. Gohain Baruah to regenerate the Ahoms economically, politically and culturally. Explaining the objectives Gohain Baruah said ; 'It is of course my duty to further or protect the interest of my community but I yield in my endeavour to protect and uphold my community the interest of my country and countrymen'.⁴ The case was otherwise with the Ahom Association. To curb the cultural domination of the high caste Hindus, despite opposition of the liberal-minded Ahoms, the Association sought to introduce *nam-kirtan* instead of idol worship, tabulating 'Ahom' in place of "Hindu" in the census and ridiculed Indian National Congress as 'a league of caste Hindus'.⁵ To maintain the distinct identity of the Ahoms, the Association demanded the recognition of the Ahoms as the 'minority' and separate electorate for the community. In 1944 through the initiative of the Association an *All Other Tribes and Races Federation* was formed at Shillong with the object of forming a 'Sovereign Independent State' of Assam inasmuch as Assam can never be a digestible part of India now or in future. Assam has today become a milch - cow of Hindustan, a cesspool of Bengal and a pawn on the chessboard of Indian politics'.⁶ The lack of co-ordination amongst the tribes and races and the growing influence of the Indian National Congress rendered it difficult for the Association to mature plans to reach its goal of a independent state of Assam.⁷ In the late forties when constitutional reform was on anvil, the Association and the tribal elite had to be content in pleading for adequate safeguards to protect and preserve their distinct ethnic identities.

4. *Assam Legislative Council Debates*. V, 10 April 1913, 67-72.

5. Even an Ahom scholar of repute P. Gogoi presiding over the National Ahom Conference at Lahing, April 1941, denounced the Association as 'An anti-national organisation of a small coterie of upper and middle class Ahoms ... injecting the virus of communalism in to the veins of the Ahoms', Bhuyan, A.C. and others *Political History of Assam, 1940-47*. 302-3.

6. Phukon, Girin, *op.cit.*

7. 'Demands of the Tribal Committee of Assam': A memorandum issued by the Conference of leaders of Tribal Committee of Assam, Shillong, July 1946, 2f.

The post-colonial period although saw a decline of the revivalist movement, in 1967 a convention was held at Garhgaon, former capital of Assam near Sibsagar, demanding a separate autonomous State of Upper Assam.⁸ This was reiterated by the *Tai-Ahom Land Demand Committee* in another convention held at Guwahati on 3 February 1996 calling upon the Ahom intellectuals to initiate a movement for a homeland as they are 'marginalised' by the more advanced assertive section of the Assamese. They were critical of the Bhupinder Singh Committee constituted to go into the autonomous demands raised by the Boros and other ethnic groups in not recommending a homeland for the Tai-Ahoms.⁹ The convention called for a Tai-Ahom Land comprising areas of Assam at the treaty of Yandabo 1826 with Ajuha as headquarters in the Dhemaji district. In view of their enjoyment of special benefits and occupation of rightful place in Assam politics, the demand for a homeland for the Ahoms is yet to be hardened particularly in areas they are outnumbered by communities other than their own:

The emergence of the Hill States emboldened the Boros, a major segment of the plains tribals, to make a similar demand for Statehood. 'They are numerically stronger than the Nagas, Mizos, Khasis and Garos', they argued, 'if they can be a separate State, why not us'.¹⁰ The seeds of division between the Boros and the caste Hindus may be traced to the delegation of the *Assam Kachari Juba Sanmilan* and *Boro Juba Sanmilan* which met the *Simon Commission* in 1928-30 demanding recognition of the Boros as a separate unit. The plains tribals generally felt that they were most backward economically, educationally and politically, and they held that the Assamese caste Hindus were mainly responsible.¹¹ Complaints were made that Gopinath Bardoloi, Chairman North-East

8. Singh B.P., *The Problem of Change*, 100: Shekhar Gupta, *Assam: A Valley Divided*, 153.

9. *The Statesman*, 5 February 1996.

10. Arup Chanda 'Bodos on the War path', *The Statesman*, 15 April, 1989.

No Primary source is available as to the claim of the Boros as 'bhumi-putra' or son of the soil nor is there any evidence that Assam was ever ruled by a Boro dynasty. Literary, numismatic and archaeological evidence are of course plentiful as to the Kachari rulers in Upper Assam and Cachar. Boros and the Kacharis though belong to the Tibet-Burman group, socially they are considered not the same in customs, usage and religious rites. See Chaudhury, Naren, 'Boro and Kachari eke gothir ne? *Dainik Asom*, 8-9 November, 1980; also Mosahary, R.N. 'The Boros: Their origin and settlements in Assam, in Assam, *NEIHA*, 1983 42f; Daimari, B., 'Bodo and Boro', *Ibid.*, 1987, 528f.

11. In 1933, under the leadership of Rupnath Brahma, Bhimbar Deuri and others the *All Assam Plains Tribal League* a political organisation was formed to pressurise the government to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the Plains Tribals of the region.

Frontier Tribal Areas Sub-committee, failed to do justice to the plains tribals by treating them as an integral part of the Assamese depriving them thereby their special rights and privileges, the Assam government did precious little to improve the lot of the tribesmen and that the funds allocated for their welfare not unoften utilized for purposes other than intended by the government.¹²

In spite of ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity, unlike tribals in neighboring hills, there had been 'a synthesis of culture and fusion of races' in the plains which is borne out by their history, language, literature and works of art. An integral part of the Assamese nationality, they were designated as 'Hindu' and for reasons political censused 'Tribal' since 1941*. Assamese continued to be their language. Annual *Bihus* are common to both the tribals and indigenous Assamese. Boro deity *Bathou-Borai* has been identified as Hindu *Shiva*. Process of assimilation notwithstanding, there had been no cultural domination of the tribals by the non-tribals. With his sincere conviction of the homogeneity of the Assamese nationality, Bardoloi was not prepared, it is true, to reverse the process of assimilation by putting the plains tribals on the same footing with the tribesmen in the hills, for such a measure, he believed, would lead to disintegration and contrary to the principles of unity and integrity repeatedly stressed by the Union government. His views received the strongest support of Rupnath Brahma, a plains tribal and a member of the *Tribal Area Sub-Committee*, who stood opposed to the separation move of a section of the tribals. On the separatist move, quips sobre ex-MP and PTCA leader Charan Narzary: 'Is It possible a strife-torn ethnic society like the Bodos, to which I belong, to survive alone in isolation without Assam? Answering in the negative, he elaborates :

Notwithstanding certain noticeable difference, (the ethnic groups including dominant Assamese) are socially, culturally and in many other spheres of life so intricately inter-woven and complementary to one another that we can think of our survival only in terms of peaceful co-existence based on mutual respect, good will, tolerance and cooperation and not otherwise.

The Sixth Schedule provided adequate safeguards to protect the rights, customs, usages and distinct identity of the plains tribals. The

12. 'Bardoloi neglected Assam' *The Sentinel*, 5 September, 'Tribals and Bardoloi', letter to the Editor, *Ibid.*, 13 September, 1995; Hazarika, *op.cit.*, 154-5. *Constituent Assembly Debates*, VII, 121, 127, 156.

* *Ibid. Supra*, 37-8, n 21.

much-repeated rhetoric that these tribesmen were exploited by vested interests is without any foundation. Not only the plains tribals had been made Cabinet and even Chief Ministers since Independence, but due weightage given throughout in appointments, scholarships and admission into academic institutions. Is it not a fact that under Article 275, the development schemes of the tribal areas under successive plans had been formulated at different levels after due deliberation and approval of the tribal leaders and representatives, and crores and crores being spent for their implementation ? It is true, as elsewhere in the State, fruits of plans did not reach the poor and under-privileged and the success of the plans were measured in terms of targets reached and in spending money in establishments, buildings and equipments. *Unless productivity and accountability are made the yardstick, it will be a cry in wilderness to improve the lot of the masses irrespective of the tribals and non-tribals.*

The alienation of the Boros may however be attributed, to the unending influx of immigrants and utter neglect of the Centre and State government to safeguard their interests. Under provisions of the Assam Land Revenue Manual of 1886, as amended in 1893, tribals were expected to be protected of their land. Rules were respected more in violation than observance. The *Line System* was introduced to preserve the rights of the tribesmen, but these were done away with under Saadullah's government.¹³ The miseries of the tribesmen were on the increase under the Assam Ceiling Act. In the hands of inefficient and corrupt officials of the revenue department not infrequently on the death of an individual the land continues to be in his name and should be shared by several successors. Such lands would be resumed under the Ceiling Act and officially reallocated to non-tribals including immigrants. Thus we have immigrant Muslims around tribal blocks and belts of Bijni (Goalpara), Kokrajhar, Bengali Hindus in Goreswar (Kamrup), Kalaigaon (Darrang) and Assamese in Gohpur area of the Sonitpur district. Most of the occupants were the victims of the holocaust of 1983. The inflow of immigrants into their settlement could not but alarm the tribesmen that at no distant future their

13. 'Statement and evidence tendered by people during the *Line System Committee* tours revealed that the tribal villages were the worst victims of unregulated encroachments of the vacant land by the aggressive immigrants from Mymensingh. Many tribal villages disappeared and their inhabitants moved to into sub-montane zone', 'Das, J.N. 'genesis of Tribal Belt, and Blocks' in Bordoloi B.N. ed., *Alienation of Tribal Land and indebtedness*', 31.

problem would be the very survival, that their identity would be lost. Small wonder that the Boros took law into their own hands when the opportunity presented itself.¹⁴

Boro resurgence had its origin with the formation of *Boro Sahitya Sabha* at Basugaon near Kokrajhar in November 1952. To defend the right and interests of the community, *All Boro Students Union* (ABSU) was organised in 1967, and this was followed by the emergence of *Plains Tribal Council of Assam* (PTCA), a political organisation, with Kokrajhar as its headquarters. In 1973 the Council sought separation of the plains tribal areas from Assam and demanded a Union Territory—*Udayachal*. It soon relegated to the background on the emergence of the Roman script movement¹⁵ (1973-74). In 1978 the Janata Party came to power with PTCA as coalition partners, Samar Brahma Chaudhury became Minister in Janata government while Charan Narzary was elected to the Lok Sabha.¹⁶

Boro autonomous movement was the inevitable result of the partition of Assam under Assam Reorganisation and North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971. *All Boro Students' Union* (ABSU) made the demand 'Divide Assam Fifty-Fifty although the Boros constitute only a small percentage of the total population'. The AGP leadership missed the golden opportunity to arrive at a *rapprochement* in 1986 when its erstwhile member Upen Brahma was elected the President of ABSU. Non-implementation of Assam Accord apart⁺, the shabby treatment said to be meted out to ABSU leadership and irresponsible statement made by the Chief Minister—'we will shed every drop of blood to prevent fragmentation of Assam'—made the 'firebrand youth' to take the path of violence. The ABSU and the newly-formed *Boro People's Action Committee* (BPAC)

14. 'Tribal is grievously upset', remarks Shekhar Gupta, 'not because he is worried about his language or its script or about a few more seats in the assembly or even that frequently contested commodity, cultural identity (but) it is a question of his very survival, his two square meals', *Assam ; A Valley Divided*, 150.

15. The Boros have no script of their own. After rejection of the Assamese they adopted Roman script and finally switched over to the Devnagari on the persuasion of New Delhi. Assamese script is much easier than the Devnagri, but 'Boro leadership could not swallow their pride' as the movement was against use of Assamese language and script.

16. Arup Chanda, *op.cit.*

* In 1971 census the total number of scheduled tribes is 28.7 lakhs i.e. 12.82 percent of the population of Assam; of these approximately 11 lakhs are Boros/Boro-Kacharis on the north bank of the Brahmaputra.

+ *Supra*, 78.

jointly launched agitation for the redress of grievances of the Boro people.¹⁷

Hence followed prolonged *bandhs*, bomb blasts, destruction of public buildings, railway tracks, bridges resulting in disruption of communication and movement of essential supply to and from North-east India. The Assamese civil officers and police personnel were made to leave the Boro-dominated areas and the government extended the Terrorists and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1937 against ABSU. The district authorities clamped down section 144 Cr.PC to prevent public meetings and organisations. In Kokrajhar and Udalguri sub-division of the Darrang district majority of the houses remained vacant at night. Not only the young, but women and children had to take shelter in nearby jungles for fear of raiding police parties. Boros were suspected as terrorist and in the name of encounters not even old and invalids were spared.¹⁸

Evidently, the failure of the AGP government to meet even half-way the demands of ABSU sparked off ethnic violence which reached its highest pitch with the emergence of *Boro Security Force* (BrSF).¹⁹ The origin of this extremist organisation has been traced to the *Special Security Bureau* (SSB) created by the Union government to resist the aggressions beyond the border in the wake of the Chinese invasion in 1962. After necessary screening they were trained within and outside the State in the use of arms, explosives and intelligence service. The number of militants initially did not exceed two hundred, but their very name became a terror with their knowledge of topography of the land, extensive intelligence and surprised attacks and ambushes. In 1990 alone they killed over fifty and wounded not less than a hundred. They kidnapped in rapid succession managers of Nanaipara T.E. of Godricks group (October

17. Arup Chanda, *op.cit.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. Our knowledge as to this organisation is extremely limited. All that is known of it is from a few documents captured during military operations or from interrogation of Boro militants is that the Br.SF originated at a village in the district of Darrang in October 1986. One Rajen Daimari, an M.A. in Political Science, is credited with drafting of its constitution. It declares: 'We, the Revolutionary Boro do hereby solemnly resolve to constitute a Revolutionary organisation for an armed struggle to liberate the Boroland for distinct identity and civilisation of the Boros and therein to transfer a democratic socialist society to promote liberty, equality and fraternity'. The militant outfit is said to have little to do with ABSU and its constituent BPAC. See Prabhakara, 'A Clandestine outfit', *Frontline*, 18 June 1993, 38-9 ; *The Sentinel*, 3 January 1995.

1991), Dimakuchi T.E. of Williamson Magor group (March 1992) and Bolin Bardoloi of Tata Tea Ltd. son of Gopinath Bardoloi. The first two had to pay ransom to the tune of crores and it is not known whether Bardoloi who was also released after eleven months had to pay any amount to his captors²⁰.

In 1990 on the premature death of ABSU President Brahma the situation took a new turn. Leadership passed under the control of S. Brahma Chaudhury and Sugai Basumatiary ; neither of them possessed the zeal and ability to carry on the operations at a time when the movement was gradually slipping out of their hands to the *Boro Security Force* (BrSF). As a face saving device, a Memorandum of Settlement was signed in February 1993 by S.K. Bwismutiary, Rabiram Brahma and Subhas Basumutiary representing the ABSU-BPAC in presence of Assam Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia and Rajesh Pilot, Union Minister of State for Home. It provided a Boroland Autonomous Unit covering an area of 5,186 square kms. on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. There was much jubilation on the surrender of ABSU militants and the release of three MLAs arrested under TADA following a bomb explosion at Guwahati on 21 November 1992.²¹

That New Delhi and Dispur acted in a hurried manner is apparent from the fact that the Accord was signed without properly determining the jurisdiction of the *Boro Autonomous Council* (BAC). Under clause 5 of the Bill²² which seeks to implement the Accord, 30 out of 40 seats in the General or Apex Council shall be reserved for the scheduled tribes. The moot question was whether plains scheduled tribes in BAC area would be 75 per cent of the total population. It will be difficult to ascertain the figures without knowing the boundary of the proposed Boroland. Apparently the Bill was against the basic constitutional scheme and reportedly writ petitions had been filed by the interested parties to the High Court challenging the validity of the Bill.²³

Saikia unilaterally demarcated the boundary by excluding 515 villages having less than 2 per cent Boros. This was stoutly opposed by S.K.

20. *Ibid.*, 'Disenchanted Bodos', Letters to editor, *The Sentinel* 3 January 1995.

21. *Ibid.*, 'The Bodo question : An Accord under Threat', *Frontline*, 19 November 1993. 48-9.

22. For the Bill see *The Sentinel*, 8 May 1994.

23. *Ibid.*, 15 July 1994.

Bwismutiary, interim Chief Executive of the BAC, who tendered his resignation forthwith to revive the demand for Boroland. The Chief Minister placed Prem Singh Brahma, a former hard-core, at the head of the BAC pending election of the Council.²⁴ Boro leadership was thus divided into two camps : Brahma and Bwismutiary and only ABSU remained a force to be reckoned with. Apart from the rift, the Boros faced the serious problem : they were to prove their majority in areas specified as BAC. 'While immigrants continue to flood our region', said a Boro leader, 'government was busy in giving the *pattas*'. Small wonder that it was difficult for them to prove their majority in most of the BAC area, and in some they were in a hopeless minority.²⁵

Moderation of the new leadership brought to the forefront the extremists to launch by threat and terror 'cleansing operation' of the immigrant Muslims to change the ethnic character of the area under occupation of the non-boros. Said UMF General Secretary Golam Osmani : 'The militants are determined to make sure that not a single non-tribal is allowed to stay in their territory'.²⁶ Since the signing of the Accord tension was building up in the entire region. Immigrants were told to move out or face consequence in spite of the fact that majority of them were Indian citizens under the terms of the Assam Accord, 1985. Violence occurred simultaneously in the districts of Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar in October 1993 when the extremists backed by the Br.SF butchered over one hundred (officially 66) migrants including women and children. But the most gruesome massacre took place at the relief camp Bashbari in the Barpeta district in early hours of 24 July 1994 in which over hundred (official version 68) killed, hundreds of houses torched and nearly 70,000 rendered homeless.²⁷ Fear psychosis gripped the whole of the BAC area. At Kokrajhar, reportedly miscreants entered at any time or make demands of huge amount which were on the increase compelling businessmen to shift their establishments to Siliguri and Coch Behar.²⁸

24. *The Statesman*, 8 September, 1994., Prabhakara, 'Chronologies of Trouble', *Frontline*, 26 August 1994, 34.

25. *The Statesman*, August 94 ; *infra* 103, note 46.

26. Chaudhury, Kalyan, 'North-East: Outrage in Assam : Bodo on Rampage', *Frontline*, 26 August 1994, 28-30.

27. *Ibid.*, Barooah, R.N., 'The Ethnic Violence in Barpeta', *The Sentinel*, Saturday Faro, 24 September 1994.

28. *Ibid.*, 22 February, 1995.

'I know such a situation would develop', said Saikia to *Frontline* when he was queried on the boundary issue. 'I requested Pilot not to sign the Accord in haste...All violence is now concentrated in the BAC area and is being carried out with the backing of the Br.SF.'²⁹ That the Assam Chief Minister had to sign the Accord under duress is apparent when he explains:

I made it clear that the Boro-dominated areas of Lower Assam were not contiguous. So if non-Boro areas were to be included in the BAC area for the sake of contiguity, *the consent of the non-Boros would have to be obtained. Mr. Pilot however refused to listen and told me the draft had the blessings of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao.* Thus I had no choice but to agree.³⁰

S.B. Chavan, Union Home-Minister, with his political wisdom and intimate knowledge of the affairs of Assam, could realise that the Accord had reduced the non-Boros, comprising about two-thirds of the population in BAC area, to the status of second class citizens. Reportedly there was a sharp difference in opinion between the Home Minister and Pilot in the hurried manner in which the Accord was signed and BAC was formed.³¹ But for 'the blessings of the Prime Minister', one cannot but have grave doubts whether the Minister of State would have been bold enough to pressurise Saikia's government to sign the Accord. Instead of taking into his confidence the man on the spot on this highly sensitive issue the Prime Minister dittoed the action of Pilot whose knowledge of history, language and cultural mores of the region was extremely limited. If Ms. Gandhi was responsible for the killings of 1983, Narasimha Rao and his cohorts were no less responsible for the brutal massacre of immigrants at Kokrajhar, Barpeta and Bongaigaon.

The Union government set up in early 1992 the *Bhupinder Singh Committee*³² to determine the area of the Boros and other plains tribes in

29. Chaudhury Kalyan, 'The North-East Area of Darkness : Accord unclear of Territories', *Frontline*, 26 August 1994, 30-1.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*

32. Appointed in February 1991, the Committee was headed by Dr Bhupinder Singh, IAS, (Retd), and two other members - Dr K.S.Singh, IAS, Director General of Anthropological Survey of India and Shri A.M.Gokhale, Joint Secretary, Department of Rural Development, Government of India. The Committee had to suspend its work following a writ petition challenging the legality of the Commission. On vacation of the stay order the work was resumed ; its recommendations were not acceptable to the ABSU-BPAC as falling short of their demand.

the north of the Brahmaputra and to make recommendation as to the legislative, administrative and financial powers that may be given to the autonomous structures for these areas. On the basis of this report Bodo Accord was formed which was accepted by the ABSU-BPAC. The BAC Bill, already an Act, (Notification, 10 December 1983) contains within itself germs of dissolution. It confers the leadership no power of legislation not of an autonomous State nor even of a district council. 'The Bill reduced the BAC to an entity lower than that of *gaon panchayat* and this is definitely not the maximum autonomy envisaged in the Memorandum of Settlement'³³ It was only a question of time when the Boros will demand radical amendment and even Statehood failing which joining hands with the BrSF, then at large, renew agitation vigorously to achieve their ultimate goal.³⁴

The Home Minister desired to have the election to the BAC as early as possible after delimitation of the constituencies.³⁵ This was rendered difficult since the jurisdiction of the BAC area remained undemarcated. Said an articulate Boro : 'We sacrificed our demand for a separate State to pave the way for BAC, but the government have not given anything in return.'³⁶ S. K. Bwismutiary, Chairman of the newly-emerged *Boro People's Party* (BPP), found no option but to take the 'crucial decision' to re-launch the agitation for a full-fledged State as the government had failed to fulfil the 'genuine' hopes and aspirations of the Boro people. On 27 August 1995, a four-member delegation headed by the President presented a memorandum to the Prime Minister demanding a fresh dialogue on their demands—a full-fledged autonomous State without any link with Assam from the river Sankosh to Sadiya on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, creation of Nilachal autonomous district in the south and inclusion of Boro-Kacharis of the Karbi-Anglong district in Scheduled Tribes (Hills) list. It is debatable whether BPP's right to rule over the non-tribals as a 'genuine' grievance and whether it had the right to speak on behalf of other tribals. It was however the duty of the Centre and the State

33. Dutta, Niloy, 'BAC Bill Broken Promise'. *The Sentinel*, 9 August 1994.

34. The resumption of violence in Boro-dominated areas is a pointer that the agitation leaders who had spearheaded the movement were not keeping silent and S.K. Bwisamutiary had been harping all along 'Hopes and aspirations of the Boros could not be realised unless there is a separate full-fledged State of the Boros'. *The Sentinel*, 8 November, 1993.

35. *The Statesman*, 13 July 1995.

36. *Ibid.*

government to bring home to the Boro leadership in unequivocal terms whether the government would concede to their demands and if so to what extent. Neither the Union nor the State government acted with promptitude drifting matters to the present impasse.

In fulfilment of Congress-I election manifesto, Saikia's government had also granted autonomy to the Lalungs (Tiwas), Misings and the Rabha-Hasongs. Shortcomings of the BAC Act had been avoided to some extent in the Memoranda of Settlements. The Apex Council of the Lalungs and the Misings will have satellite areas of village councils without separate compact areas or boundaries. The Mising and Rabha-Hasong village council will consist of more than 50 percent tribal population of these tribes with a population 6,000 to 8,000. Funds will be provided from Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) and other sources, but village council will have to be managed exclusively by its executive council. The rights and interests of non-tribals and other tribes will have to be protected by the Council and the State government.³⁷

Tribesmen of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills had enjoyed autonomy with *District Councils* of their own.³⁸ In 1971 when Meghalaya was created these two districts preferred to stay with Assam and the State leadership assured them greater independence. In 1987, the *Karbi-Autonomous State Demand Committee* (KASDC) and the *Karbi Students Association* (KAS) in a memorandum to Rajiv Gandhi demanded Statehood³⁹ on the ground they had been kept out of the mainstream of the Assamese, dominated by the contractors and businessman*, and that Assamese was imposed on their schools and colleges despite their demand for retention of English. The AGP government was prepared to concede to all reasonable demands but not an autonomous state which would be the preliminary step for full-fledged statehood. Karbi leaders were well aware that pumping in money will not be a solution, for this will 'fritter away.'

37. *The Sentinel*, 14 April (Tiwa); *The Statesman*, 14 June (Mising) and *The Sentinel*, 9 August 1995 (Rabha-Hasong).

38. *The Sentinel*, editorial, 28 August, 8 November 1995 (PTI).

39. Menon, 'Assam Tribal Unrest' *India Today*, 15 September. 1987, 66-7.

* Exploitation of the unsophisticated tribesmen by businessman was apparent when 'Generators worth 8000 have been bought for Rs. 32,000, clocks costing Rs. 125 have been procured for Rs. 750, bananas available for Rs. 6 a dozen have been procured for an incredible Rs. 84'. This explains the reason why literacy in the hills was only 10%, and in the interior tribals subsisted on tubular roots in the summer.

Already forty crores had been allotted by the Centre under the plans, but this had been 'gobbled up' by those who had been hand in gloves with bureaucrats at Dispur. Only an autonomous status, they strongly felt, would satisfy their needs and political aspirations.⁴⁰

In July 1992, the Council was given greater autonomy ; but soon it had to be superseded on charges of gross financial irregularities. The Comptroller and Accountant General's (CAG) report (1985-90) strengthens the belief that most of these demands for autonomy or separate states were meant not so much for decentralization of powers as to the distribution of Central funds amongst leaders who spearheaded these movements.⁴¹ After successive *bandhs*, strikes, picketings a Tripartite Agreement was made in April 1995 which envisaged the amendment of the clause 3 (1) of the Sixth Schedule for transfer of legislative powers in respect of fourteen other subjects.. The Councillors were allowed to have direct access to the Governor and to prepare their budgets and to participate in discussions for financial allocation to the councils with the Planning Commission.⁴² Time alone will show whether the tribals will adhere or throw to winds para 2 of the MOU to hold the integrity of the State of Assam and not take recourse to any further reorganisation or division of the State.'*

Election in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills, which was deferred on deteriorating law and order situation arising out of activities of the NSCN activists, was held in June 1996. Nonetheless the MOU signed by the N. C. Hills was treated by the leadership as 'vague' signed by students' organisation, not binding to them, whatever. Infact the situation took a new turn with the emergence of the extremist *Karbi National Volunteers* (KNV) in March 1995 with the object of liberating Karbi Anglong from Indian 'colonialists.' Its cadres started for training

40. *Ibid*, editorial, *The Sentinel*, 22 February 1997

41. *Ibid*.

42. *The Sentinel*, 2 April 1995.

* 'Keeping in view the strong commitment of the Central government the Government of Assam and organisation's signatories to this MOU, to uphold the integrity of the State of Assam and not to take recourse to any further reorganisation divisions of the State, efforts continued in the direction of finding a solution in the framework of the Sixth Schedule of the constitution'. Cited in *The Sentinel*, editorial, 6 April 1995.

in arms to Hyderabad, Nagaland and Bangladesh.⁴³ The President and the General Secretary KNV had called upon his compatriots to join in a 'undeclared war' against the Indian government. The ASDC then in power was reported to be in league with the KNV. The activities of the KNV and ASDC had been challenged by the *Citizens Rights Committee* (CRPC) of the non tribals : Assamese, Bengalis, Biharis, Nepalese-who constitute over 60 per cent of the population. A delegation of CRPC had already gone to Delhi to apprise the Centre of the activities of the KNV and ASDC.⁴⁴ The prospect of peace in these two districts is apparently remote.

Hiteswar Saikia was subjected to severe criticism for voluntarily offering autonomy to the Tiwas, Misings, Rabhas and Hasongs since the demand of these ethnic groups was not strong as those of the Boros. The Chief Minister defended that the offer was intended to curb the trend towards tribal alienation, and that the powers conferred to autonomous councils were similar to those to be handed over the *Zila Parishads* under the *Panchayati rajs* system.⁴⁵ Saikia failed to realise that having created the precedent, it would be difficult for the government to reject similar demands^{45a} even for a few hundred tribesmen for no other purpose than the loaves and fishes to be derived by the office-bearers who had been spearheading the movements.

No political party other than the CPI lent whole-hearted support to the government move nor any party challenged the principle of autonomy for Assam tribals; all that they wanted was the demarcation of the autonomous areas and that there must be at least fifty per cent population of the tribe concerned in a given autonomous area and that the interest of the non-tribals must be protected. The crux of the matter was all these tribals lived in mixed areas where non-tribals constituted the majority even at the village level. Exclusion of these areas does not arise strictly in conformity with the principle of self determination;⁴⁶ but the tribal

43. *The Statesman* 'Karbi Elections', 8 March 1996.

44. 'New Extremist outfit' *The Sentinel* 28 November 1995.

45. Chaudhury, Rabijit 'Assam and its Tribes : Why autonomous is a far cry', *The Statesman*, 19 January 1995.

45a. Already the Tai-Fake, Singphos, Khamtis, Khamyangs, Sema Nagas, Tangshas under the aegis of *Tirap Autonomous District Demand Committee* had been vociferous over autonomy in the tribal - dominated areas in the Tirap frontier. 'Tribal demand autonomy', *The Sentinel*, 24 October 1996.

46. *Ibid.*, BAC area covers 2,570 millages, spread over an area of 5,186 square kms with a total population 2,137,45. No consideration whatever was given to the non-Boros which constitute two-third of the total population; The Boros were only 813, 303 while non-Boros 1, 324, 142.

leadership insisted on the monopoly of representation in the elective council, refusing to accept ethnic majority as a criterion for inclusion in the autonomous areas.

To neutralise the demographic imbalance, endeavours had been made by Saikia's government to place the backward groups in the category of Scheduled Tribes. This is a reversal of the gear of the upward mobility of the lower orders in the social hierarchy which was in progress in the later half of the nineteenth century⁴⁷. Since Independence reservation of the rights and privileges under the Constitution induced even some of the higher classes to relegate themselves to the status of *Other Backward and Scheduled Tribes*. Inspired by their kinsmen in Meghalaya and Coch Behar, the Koch-Rajbanshis had been agitating to enlist themselves as Scheduled Tribes; their demands received but scant attention until Hiteswar Saikia headed the government in 1991.⁴⁸ The Presidential ordinance of 17 January 1996 temporarily fulfilled the aspirations of the Koch-Rajbanshis and ensured Saikia's electoral gains in the polls.

In early January 1996 on the occasion of the Madam-Me-fi celebration a section of the Ahoms also made the demand for inclusion of the community in the Sixth Schedule of the constitution. If the Tai-Phake and Tai-Turung were categorised as Scheduled Tribes, they argued, convention demands that similar status be extended to all the groups of the Tai-Ahoms. Realising the serious implication of the move, the sober section of the community opposed such a 'dangerous development.' Saikia's government had already urged the Union government to include the Ahoms, Chutiyas, Matakas, Morans and tea-tribes along with Koch-Rajbanshis in the Sixth Schedule.⁴⁹ Question arises: Is it possible to distinguish between the Ahoms and the caste Hindus in terms of privileges, language, customs, dress, food habits? How can the Ahoms who occupy the pride of place in Assamese society be demoted to the status of the

47. For further study see Bimal Dev and Dilip Lahiri, *Cosmogony of Caste and Social Mobility in Assam*, 21f; Barpujari. ed., *CHA*, V. 164-6.

48. Rajbanshi, Paramananda, '*Koch-Rajbanshis Janajati marjada*' *Asom Bani*, 1 March 1996.

49. 'Tai-Ahom demanded separate Homeland'. *The Statesman*, 5 February 1996, *The Sentinel*, editorial, 'Not by further Division', 2 February 1996.

Scheduled Tribes?⁵⁰ The present move of the government, rather the vested interests, will be beneficial to the privileged few, but lead to fragmentation of the truncated State 'making it more vulnerable to foreign infiltrators and exploitation of the ethnic groups.'

The geo-political and volatile scenario of the north-east India demands unity and integrity of Assam. The Bhupinder Singh Committee, utterly failed to realise that multiplication of jurisdiction or smaller units would be the greatest hurdle from the point of view of national unity, stability and security. Defensive measures may be a responsibility of the Union government, but the State government must share a part of security arrangements. Financially, too, almost all units are not viable. Major share of expenditure, both the maintenance and development, will have to be borne by the State and Union government. These will create, as in neighbouring hills, privileged few with attendant evils, but will not be a solution of the problem of those still in primitive stages of development. To make matters worse, the Committee had burdened an already bankrupt State with luxury of an Upper House⁵¹ to meet the complex ethnic problems although there is 'no guarantee' to that effect under Article 171 of the Constitution.⁵²

The political aspirations of some homogeneous groups could have been fulfilled by a thorough amendment of the relevant provisions of the Sixth Schedule or by constitutional amendments 73rd and 74th for

50. 'The Sixth Schedule Status' *The Sentinel*, editorial, 10 January 1996. 'Reservation with a premium of so-called backwardness have done incalculable harm to the Vokkaliggas, Lingayats and Yadavas, as communities and we see no reason to imagine that things will be any different for the Koch-Rajbanshis and the Ahoms.' *The Sentinel*, editorial, 31 January 1996. Be that as it may, such a measure puts a premium on accidents of one's birth and serves by and large the political parties and their leaders electoral gains with block votes. Apprehending its disastrous effects on smaller ethnic groups, a segment of the tribesmen had already opposed the move of the Union and State government's decision to include Koch-Rajbanshi's and others in the list of Scheduled Tribes. *The Statesman*, 14 July 1996. (PTI).

51. Notwithstanding the State government is in a debt-trap over 6000 crores, Assam Assembly already passed a resolution to set-up an Upper House. This would inevitably delay the process of legislation and would embolden the sister States in the region to follow up the precedent to create 'sinecures' to politicians, The entire burden of this 'avoidable luxury' will have to be borne, of course, by the poor tax-payers on account of their salaries, perquisites, residential accommodation and pensions for life.

52. 'Upper House for Assam' *The Sentinel*, 27 September 1995.

devolution of more powers, to *panchayats* and local bodies.⁵³ It is vain to expect, as conceived by the Assam Chief Minister, that the grant of autonomy will keep the unity and integrity of the State. What is the guarantee that the Karbis and the Boros, (even accorded full autonomy) will not clamour for full-fledged Statehood? In that eventuality how can the Union and the State government resist legitimate and forceful claims of the Koch-Rajbanshis and the Tai-Ahoms who ruled the Valley of the Brahmaputra till the eve of British occupation ? Experience shows such demands will have to be conceded after a period of agitation attended with strikes, *bandhs* and killings. Will the tea-tribes and pockets of immigrant Muslims remain silent spectators of the scene ? The process of disintegration thus set in motion will have to be continued and the balkanisation of Assam will be *fait accompli* perhaps in the early decades of the next century.

53. See Kalita, G.S. 'Myths about Tribal Autonomy' *The Sentinel*, 18 December, 1994.

NSCN : Secessionism, Militancy, Insurgency

The dreaded Naga Socialist Council of Nagaland which has of late spread its tentacles to the entire north-east had its origin in 1975 following the Shillong Accord between Naga National Council (NNC) and the government. Peace-loving moderates joined the mainstream but extremists under Angami Zapu Phizo and Thuingaleng Muivah stood opposed to the accord as the 'most ignominious sale out' and determined to uphold sovereign Nagaland. They felt NNC had totally failed to keep pace with changing circumstances, 'isolated itself from the people' and it has nothing in its programme to save the people from the 'process of domination, exploitation and assimilation.' For the salvation of the Naga people, in their view, there is no other organisation than NSCN. Phizo died in London, Muivah joining hands with Isak Chishi Swu, a Tankhul from Myanmar, formed the *Naga Socialist Council of Nagaland* (NSCN). It declares in its manifesto :

- (i) The unquestionable sovereign rights of the Naga people over every inch of Nagaland.
- (ii) Dictatorship of the people through the NSCN and the practice of Democracy... as long as it is deemed necessary.
- (iii) The faith in God and salvation of mankind in Jesus Christ.
- (iv) Socialism and economic systems for the removal of exploitation and ensuring fair equality to all the people.
- (v) Rules out saving Nagaland through peaceful means and pins its faith on arms to save the nation and to ensure freedom to the people.¹

The NSCN had its headquarters on the border of Manipur in Myanmar territory. That China had been its 'mentor' is borne out by its ideology which is a blending of Christianity with the philosophy of Mao-

1. Isak Chishi Swu and Th. Muivah, *Manifesto of the National Council of Nagaland*, Kohima (Oking), Second edition, 37-9.

Zedong. With its close links and support in arms and training with Beijing, NSCN had been carrying on its operations in Nagaland, Manipur and even in Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh. Playing a host to other extremist outfits, it escorted them through the difficult terrain to China for arms and training and this was rendered possible through its friendly relations with the Karens and the Kachin insurgents of Myanmar.² In 1988, ideological reasons and inter-tribal feud led to a split in the organisation : one faction under Isak Swu and Muivah (I-M, South) and the other led by S. S. Khaplang (K, North), a Remi Naga of Myanmar. Most of the insurgent outfits are affiliated to one or the other organisation. Of these, *Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front* (IBRF) founded in 1990 has its constituents *United National Liberation Front* (UNLF) of Manipur, *United Liberation Front of Assam* (ULFA) and NSCN-North. Other outfits NSCN-South sponsored *Indo-Burmese Liberation Front* (IBLF) and Manipur based organisations : *Revolutionary Peoples' Front* (RPF), *Kangleipak Communist Party* (KCP), *People's Liberation Party of Kangleipak* (PREPAK), *Hmars People's Convention* (HPC) of Manipur, Mizoram and *Bodo Security Force* (BrSF).³

Initially, activities of the NSCN had been carried on the border of Myanmar-Manipur-Nagaland wherein they had base camps and training centres of a number of insurgent organisations. They had been terrorizing and killing civil population, extorting money and carrying on smuggling traffic.⁴ Through Moreh on Nagaland-Myanmar border narcotics worth several crores of rupees had been smuggled daily into India. They had the support of the Imphal Valley on the total indifference of New Delhi and Congress government of Manipur. The latter for reasons of its own was unprepared to condemn the activities of the NSCN.⁵ In his visit to the Valley in 1993 eminent journalist Kuldip Nayar found

the problem was too much money had been pumped in ; ministers and so-called leaders had laced their purses, that little was left for development or employment. This had revived the NSCN which had very little support even three or four years ago.⁶

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2. Dasgupta, Arun, 'Uneasy calm in North-East,' *Mainstream*, 20 December 1986, 3-4.
 3. Prabhakara, 'States of Insurgency,' *Frontline*, 11 February, 1994, 28.
 4. Hazarika, Sanjoy, *The Strangers of the Mist*, 238-9; *The Statesman*, 24 August 1995.
 5. *News Item, The Sentinel*, 30 January, 1995.
 6. Nayar, 'Between the Lines : Defiance by the Nagas,' *The Statesmen*, 8 March 1995.

In his view, Centre's high-handedness and divide and rule policy were at the root of all the troubles. Reishang Keishing, a Tangkhul, who had been made the Chief Minister in spite of the fact that the Congress had only 21 out of 59 seats in the State Assembly, had been encouraged to have closer ties with NSCN (I-M). On the otherhand, S. C. Jamir, Nagaland Chief Minister, had been emboldened by providing funds to his exchequer to have links with NSCN (K).

Allegations had also been made that ethnic clashes between the Nagas and the Kukis had been deliberately incited by the authorities. In reality the conflict between these two ethnic groups originated in the colonial period.⁷ This was renewed with NSCN's determination to bring under its effective control 'Southern Nagaland', Naga-inhabited districts of Ukhrul, Chandel, Senapati and Tameglong. The *Kuki National Organisation* (KNO) with its constituent *Kuki National Army* (KNA) had been demanding apart from an autonomus State in Mynnmar, a homeland in parts of Ukhrul, Imphal valley, Kuki-inhabited areas of Nagaland and Assam. Conflict with NSCN (I - M) was thus inevitable. Kuki militants who were said to have received moral support from official agencies both of Manipur and Union government had been demanding financial assistance, in arms and materials to 'fight and finish' the NSCN (I - M).⁸ The Kuki-Naga clashes renewed in May 1992 at Moreh on Kukis' refusal to pay 'taxes' demanded by the NSCN. In January 1993, in retaliation of the killing of a Kuki, quit notices has been served on the Nagas by the KNA. Violence irrupted again and again and the officials of the government of Manipur satisfied by in issuing statements which inflamed passions of both the sides. Though the Nagas formed protection force, insurgency spread to several parts of Manipur and to the neighbouring districts of Nagaland. All that the government of these States did was the deployment of force and application of 'draconian laws' which had hardened the mistrust between the two warring communities. Commenting on the failure of the government writes Sanjay Singh, :

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- * For origin and early settlement of the Kukis see J.W. Edgar's Note in Mackenzie, *A History of Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Appendix E. art II.'
7. Barpujari, *Problems of the Hill Tribes*, iii, 217 f; Chaudhury, K. C., 'The Genesis of Naga-Kuki Feuds', *The Statesman* 23 November, 1994.
8. 'Naga-Kuki Clash,' in Gam. A., Shimray and others, *An Introduction to the Ethnic Problem in Manipur*, 12f.

Nagaland and Manipur ... have the highest per capita development expenditure allocated to them. The annual budgets of these two States amount to about 1000 crores. With such outlays and little to show by way of development, it is clear that more of the funds have been going into the pockets of political and administrative leadership of these States. In fact it will not be an exaggeration to say the several political leaders of Manipur and Nagaland have a vested interest in perpetuating ethnic strife in this region.⁹

On 31 September 1993, Congress I government was dismissed and the administration was placed under a retired Lieutenant-General V. K. Nayar and the security forces deployed in the State were brought under the control of the Army. Three weeks later Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao during his visit to Silchar on the inauguration of the Assam University assured special measures for the seven States if the insurgents gave up violence. On complaints made by revenue poor 'special category' States for drastic cuts in Central assistance, Manmohan Singh, Union Finance Minister, announced that flow of funds to them would be considerably increased.¹⁰

New Delhi had no option but to adhere to its carrot and stick policy. Apart from 'toning up security' and 'accelerating development' the Centre had also to make a radical change in its policy towards Yangon, (Rangoon). Since the middle of 1993 allegation had been made by the military and para-military forces that the Bangladesh government had not only allowed *Pakistan Inter-Servic Intelligence* (ISI) to carry on anti-Indian activities, but provided asylum to Indian insurgents : ULFA, PLA and NSCN (I-M). This had received the confirmation of the USA House of Representative though Dacca's response was one of persistent denial. It was too much to expect of any help from Dacca, the Centre was well aware, to ensure security and peace in north-east pending a satisfactory solution to the 'disproportionate share of Ganga-Padma flow.'¹¹

9. *Ibid.*, 18-9.

10. Tapas Ray, 'Seven Sisters in Strife : Insurgency and ISI,' *Front line*, 11 March 1994. 39-41.

11. *Ibid.*; Prabhakara, 'The Foreign hand : The ISI nexus in the North-East', *Front line*, 11 March 1994. According to Intelligence sources about twenty six camps had been concentrated in Chittagong hills Tract, Dacca, Mymansingh and Sylhet wherefrom fifteen outfits were subjected to indoctrination besides arms training by top-brass of Bangladesh Rifles; *The Sentinel*, 12 December 1995.

Indo-Burmese. (later Myanmar), relations had also been far from friendly. India had joined world-wide condemnation of Myanmar's military junta namely *State Law and Order Council* (SLORC), on the killings of a larger number of pro-democratic students (1988) and incarceration at home of Aung San Suu kyi, the undisputed leader of the *National League of Democracy* (NLD), which had a landslide victory in election of 1990. India even vetoed Myanmarese move to join Non-Aligned Movement at the Jakarta Summit, 1992. A perceptible change occurred in Indo-Myanmarese relations with growing eagerness of Yangon to have a departure in its policy of isolation. The exchange of visits of dignitaries A Ye, Director of Foreign Affairs, Yangon and J. N. Dixit, Indian Foreign Secretary was followed by two accords in January 1994 : one on border trade and the other on increasing contacts of civil authorities between two countries which was expected to be a better check on the insurgents and the contraband trade particularly of heroin reportedly passed through Moreh; it was the control of this traffic that originated the Kuki-Naga ethnic clashes.¹²

The democratic movement in Myanmar adversely affected the fortunes of the NSCN. Their base of operations passed under the control of *Kachin Independent Army* (KIA) and its political wing *Kachin Independent Organisation* (KIO). With its interests in restoration of democracy, the latter was not so keen in its support to the insurgents in its war against India. This apart, the cultural revolution in China and the breaking up of the thaw in Indo-Chinese relations had deprived foreign aid to the insurgents. Weakened thus by the loss of Beijing patronage and hard pressed by SLORC forces in their sanctuaries, the NSCN had no alternative but to turn to the north for its very survival.¹³

In November 1994 reportedly the NSCN formed an umbrella organisation, *Self Defence United Front of South-East Himalayan Region*

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12. Formal Inauguration of India-Myanmarese Border Trade was renewed on 14 September 1995 when P. Chidambaram, Union Commerce Minister, shook hands with Lt. General Tun Kyi, Myanmarese Minister for Trade. Part of the exercise was to check the clandestine unofficial trade between the two countries. Joint military exercise between Indo-Myanmarese Armies to flush out India-based insurgents will be within its purview. Likewise Myanmar hoped to persuade New Delhi to return the pro-democratic rebels operating from Manipur and New Delhi. *The Statesman*, from special correspondent, 12 April 1995. 'India keen on foreign ties with Myanmar' ; *The Sentinel*, 11 April; 8 May 1995.
 13. Ray, Tapas, *op. cit* 40-1; 'Elusive peace,' *ibid.* 25 September 1994, 40 f.

(SDUF), with the object of fighting against 'Indianization of indigenous peoples' through its policy of allowing 'massive influx of Indian nationals' in the region. The insurgents believed that the region is under 'forced Indian occupation' and the people had no option but to fight against 'Indian domination, exploitation, assimilation and suppression.'¹⁴ Politically, too, it had opened offices in Geneva, New York besides establishments at Bangkok, Kathmandu and in few other capitals. Defying all security and diplomatic hurdles NSCN had been successfully carrying on its anti-Indian propaganda in a number of International forums including *Unrecognised Nation's People's Organisation* (UNPO). In a meeting held in the Hague in September 1995 a resolution was passed supporting independence of Nagaland which had enabled it to have sophisticated arms from abroad to carry on armed struggle against Indian Union.¹⁵

Indecision and delay on the part of the Government of India enabled NSCN 'to cast its net wider.' Taking advantage of the difficult terrain the insurgents penetrated into the North-Cachar Hills. Situated between Myanmar and Bangladesh, it occupies an important strategic position for the NSCN as cache of arms delivered at Cox Bazar port. Chittagong Hills Tract in Bangladesh, finds its way into Nagaland and Manipur bases of the insurgents,¹⁶ In August 1990 it attacked a group of Dimasas youths at Maibong followed by a series of daylight robberies and abductions. With each success it grew bolder and soon won over Zemi and Liangmei tribe of the Nagas forming the Zeliangrong group. They acquired the latest variety of sophisticated weapons including rocket launchers substantially raising its striking power. The police force in the district, on the otherhand, remained 'grossly inadequate,' 'pathetically ill-equipped' which had enabled the newly formed *Dima-Halam-Dauga* (DHD), a small but effective splinter group, to launch a violent campaign to demand a separate Dimaland with headquarters at Maibong.¹⁷ The Government of

14. Consisting of Manipur insurgents, *BrSF alias New National Security Force of Boroland*, *Meghalayan Hynniewtrep 'A'chik Liberation Council* (HALC), *National Front of Tripura*, *Karbi National Volunteers* and NSCN, (Isak-Muivah), ULFA was not included. 'NSCN Redraws Strategy in N. E.,' *The Sentinel*, 21 February 1995.

15. 'NSCN goes International,' *The Statesman*, 20 January 1996. In a meeting held at Dacca in early 1996 NSCN formally joined UNPO in presence of all top leaders including Muivah and Isak Swu; *ibid.*, 20 June 1996.

16. *The Statesman*, 20 May 1995.

17. 'Dimaland,' *The Sentinel*, editorial, 28 April; *The Statesman*, 26 April, 1995.

Assam, which had already granted autonomy to different ethnic groups, could not concede a similar demand to DHD for the obvious reason the outfit is dominated by outlawed NSCN (I-M) with its objective to carve out an independent Zeliangroung as a part of 'Greater Nagaland.' Mobilizing the Nagas in these areas, it has constituted a battalion of 'Security task-force' imparting training openly to a large number of recruits. DHD had been forcibly collecting 'taxes' under pressure from the NSCN on the Assamese, Bengalis, Biharis and Nepalese. The Dimasas are also not spared which had alienated vast sections of the DHD.¹⁸

The NSCN (I-M) had brought under its umbrella a segment of the Hmars who had been carrying on agitation for the last few decades to have a homeland of their own in Hmar-dominated areas of Mizoram, Manipur, Assam and Meghalaya.¹⁹ The demand made by the *Hmar People's Convention* (HPC)* was not acceptable to the Mizos who considered them as integral part of the Mizo community. Well aware that the Hmars were allergic to the very concept of absorption or 'Mizohood' and with their control of a part of Silchar-Aizwal road, they had the power to sabotage the lines of communication which will be disastrous to Mizoram. State government therefore considered it politic to arrive at a settlement and an accord was made on 27 July 1994 granting autonomy to *Singlung Hill Development Council* (SHDC) for social, economic and cultural development of the Hmars under its jurisdiction.²⁰ Like the Boro accord, the agreement failed to define clearly the council's area keeping alive the political dispute between the HPC and the State government. Despite surrender of a sizeable number of the cadres of the HPC in 1994, some dissidents remained underground. The latter succeeded in establishing a nexus with the NSCN (I-M) which had supported their demand for autonomy and extended financial assistance besides supplies of arms and amunitions.²¹ They had enabled the Hmars in return for safe passage

18. 'NSCN-DHD Scheme' in N. C. Hills, *The Sentinel*, 26 April 1995.

The Ultras provided protection to collection drives by DHD and did not hesitate to issue demand notices to government officials and non-tribal traders, According to intelligent source, NSCN takes 70% of the 'tax' and levies collected.

19. Prabhakara, 'Elusive Peace; Mizoram half a decade after the accord,' *Frontline*, 8 June 1992, 42f. HPC formally came into being in a public meeting at Sakawrdai, 18 December 1987, with Laldinliana as president and Malchuma Ralchun, general Secretary.

20. Chaudhury, Rabijit, 'Mass bid farewell to Militancy' *The Statesman*, 25 August 1995.

21. 'Hmar Ultras became active,' *The Sentinel*, 16 May 1995.

through tract under their control, of their arms and men to Nagaland and Manipur to set up camps in dense forests along Assam-Mizoram border and to extend operations to the Barak Valley and North Cachar Hills.

Meghalaya, hitherto an abode of peace, was also not free from the activities of the NSCN.²² *The Hynniewtrep A'chik Liberation Council* (HALC), an underground outfit, is reported to have signed an accord at Aizwal with a number of insurgent groups to fight against the Indian Union. Extorting huge amount from businessmen, it had build up an armoury and a trained cadre of fighters. Beside the support of the *Khasi Students Union* (KSU), it had links with NSCN and ISI to run camps to train up cadres even on the border of Meghalaya. On the west, *A'chik Liberation Matgrik Army* (ALMA) had been working for the formation of a Garo State comprising areas of Assam, Meghalaya and Bangladesh where ethnic group is in a majority. Nexus with NSCN (I-M) enabled the outfit to procure sophisticated arms from Nagaland.^{22a} In Tripura, law and order situation had been seriously affected by the increasing violent activities of *All-Tripura Tiger Force* (ATTF) and *National Liberal Front* with active support of the NSCN(I-M).

On 25 February 1995, there had occurred the most daring and ruthless bomb-blast in Brahmaputra Mail near Dimapur in which forty (unofficial report) including Army personnel lost their lives suspected to be committed by NSCN (I-M) militants. This was followed by a joint robbery of NSCN and Br. SF at Dhekiajuli in the Sonitpur district²³ and link could not but cause serious concern both at Dispur and New Delhi. The insurgents had already set up several camps at the Manas Tiger sanctuary and in dense forests in the Bhutan border. Through the strategically important area in the north and the river Brahmaputra on the south pass the rail link to Guwahati and the National Highway and other routes. What is the gurantee these life-lines would not be cut off by the

22. *The Sentinel*, 10 May 1995. 'Shillong has become the favourite haven or nerve centre for all insurgent outfits of the north-east taking advantage of lax intelligence, surveillance, absence of minimum strength of security forces and indifferent attitude of the State government. It is feared that if the situation is not brought under control immediately by means of concerted anti-insurgency operation, Meghalaya may go to the Nagaland way where the insurgency practically ran a parallel government.' Mitra Debasis, *The Statesman*, 31 March 1995.

22a Ray, Tapas in North East, 'Fatal confusion. Militancy and growing Worries,' *Frontline*, 7 September 1990, 28f; 10 March, 1995, 42-3.

militants and hold the State to ransom ? With their growing demand for autonomy Koch-Rajbanshis, the Rabhas and the Santhals of the region are also restive. If NSCN (I-M) is allowed to grow from strength to strength, it will be a only a question of time its tentacles will spread beyond the borders to North-Bengal where Gurkhaland movement under Subhas Ghising is in progress.

In Nagaland, both the factions of the NSCN, T. Muivah and S. S. Khaplang, had been active over a decade. Killings and abduction apart, every employee, businessmen and contractor is subject to 'taxes' levied by the People's Republic of Nagaland.²⁴ In early 1994, bus and truck-drivers plying on the National Highway 39 through Nagaland had to pay road and goods taxes of various forms. In protest when the truck-drivers went on a strike for over a month; neither the State nor the Central forces could make their presence felt despite the fact the people of Manipur were on the verge of starvation. Over past two years Nagaland witnessed 'more skirmishes than the sum total during the worst period of earlier violence. The situation deteriorated to such an extent that no option was left the Chief Minister S. C. Jamir, but to extend Disturbed Areas Act following the murder of the D. C. Kohima, L. V. Reddy on 8 March 1995. Vamuzo, leader of opposition, in the Assembly apprehended that the unwise act of the government would aggravate the situation and the innocent civilians would be subjected to the atrocities of the security forces as was in 1960s when the cult of violence was given a stamp or official sanction.²⁵ Jamir had to face blistering criticisms from all sides culminating in a vote of non-confidence in the Nagaland Assembly. This was followed by killings, lootings and kidnappings with impunity. The unfortunate scenario had been traced to 'unholy nexus' between politicians, bureaucrats and militants which had been in operation for the last few years. Reportedly 'the under-ground live with the ministers who use them to bash up critics or kill rivals. Minister's vehicles have been used for carrying black money. More underground Nagas die in inter-tribal warfare than at the hands of

23. *The Sentinel*, 20 February, 27 April 1995; Kuldip Nayar, 'Between the Lines : Defiance of the Nagas,' *The Statesman*, 8 March, 1995.

24. In Nagaland all employees of the government particularly non-Nagas, of banks and insurance co's are required to pay Rs 500 to Rs 1000 every month on pain of death to both the factions of NSCN. The banks are forced to grant loans that has little prospect of being repaid. *The Sentinel*, 22 February 1995.

25. *The Sentinel*, 3 January, 11 September 1995; 'Politics over Security,' *The Statesman*, editorial 20 February, 1996.

the security forces.'²⁶ Inevitably, the 'Nagas are (now) desperate. They do not know if they would ever be able to get rid of the security forces and the underground. Their despair increases when they realise that the cult of gun has taken over their lands.'²⁷

The Centre rolled on *Operation Orchid* in Nagaland and the *Sunny Vale* in Manipur. The Central forces had failed to check and still less overpower the NSCN men; reports were forthcoming of ambushes and killings of army personnel in Nagaland.²⁸ In Manipur, too, with their advance knowledge of Central force they could alight with their sophisticated weapons to Bangladesh and Myanmar while 60 elected members of the Assembly were in hit-list of the underground for their role in operation of Sunny Vale. No spectacular result had been achieved in the operations although the Army had succeeded in arresting top leaders and in recovering huge cache of arms. Majority of the arrested youths could not be detained or jailed as they were found to be innocent. On the otherhand, reports were forthcoming of excesses of Central forces personnel and not unoften commanding officers had to make public apology for such misdeeds.²⁹ In June 1996, Muivah, NSCN (I-M) supremo, had announced that the militant would soon have a united operation command and develop joint operational strategies with BrSF, NLF of Tripura, PLA of Manipur and some groups of Meghalaya, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.³⁰ Already highly trained advanced insurgent group, *Cobra Force*, was reported to have crossed over to Manipur, Nagaland and Assam in small batches to carry out terrorist activities in urban areas. Reportedly the commandos were trained by ISI in Bangladesh in the art of guerrilla warfare and use of explosives like RDX, nitroglycerine (TNT) and even rocket launchers to carry on urban guerrilla warfare. Recent trend

26. 'In Kohima', said Kuldip Nayar, 'people live in fearful the fear of the security forces and the fear of the underground. Kohima is a dead city by 5 P. M., the shutters and shops are down and the doors of homes shut. None dares to be on the street after dark. One reason for the use of drugs and drinks is that evenings are too long.' 'Between the Lines : Nagas Despair, Dread their Destinu,' *The Statesman*, 19 October 1995.

27. *Ibid.*

28. 'Centre asks Manipur and Nagaland to fight militancy' *The Sentinel*, 11 September 1995.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *The Sentinel*, 16 June 1996.

indicates, according to military sources, a shift from jungle to urban warfare in a bid to scatter security forces.³¹

Civil and Military authorities were unanimous that insurgency takes deep root in the north-east due to serious security lapses and lack of coordination and planning amongst the North-eastern States. Secretary, Home Ministry K. Padmanabhaiah complained :

Whatever was done hitherto was on 'ad-hocism.' The police are ill-equipped and overburdened. They have also to deal with drug traffickers apart from urban insurgency. Much depend on their fire-power and mobility. If they are made to do with outmoded 303 rifles ... it is a wonder that they function at all.³²

In a meeting of the Chief Minister at Shillong on 29 April 1995 Rajesh Pilot, Minister of State, after making an assessment of the situation commented that not all the Chief Ministers of the region had evidenced the political will to tackle insurgency firmly. In a similar strain said the Home Secretary :

Almost all the States do not have any concrete anti-insurgency plan to contain such subversive activities. Policing was not carried out against complaints of extortion, kidnapping, murders and dokoity. Instead of taking prompt and serious action... police force not unoften shifted the responsibility on the Army.³³

Again, operation launched by the Indian Army had been facing setback due to non-cooperation of local administration.³² Instances were not rare to prove that the armed police of both Nagaland and Manipur had given weapons to the militants, and that criminals captured by the Army been released without proper trial which had a demoralising effect on the Army and sending wrong signals to the youths.³⁴

31. *The Statesman*, 10 August 1996.

The Views held by the Intelligence sources (*The Sentinel*, 30 October 1996) that the emergence of the 'Cobra' or 'King Cobra' force is nothing but a 'disinformation campaign' of the underground militants who were on the run is not tenable in view of the spurt in activities of the militant groups since early 1996, killing of maximum number of military personnel and their use of the most sophisticated weapons including RDX in their operations.

32. The Insurgents were equipped with AK-47 Rifles, M-16 21s, USA Carbines and other lethal weapons while the State police used old 303 rifles, self-loading rifles and light machine guns.' Wild Goose Chase,' *The Sentinel*, editorial, 7 May 1995.

33. *Ibid.*, editorial 3 May 1995.

34. *The Statesman*, 25 September 1994, 1 May 1995, ; *The Sentinel*, 13 July 1995.

Admittedly, ad-hocism or the policy of drift which had been the keynote of the policy of the Union government since Independence had complicated the vital issues of north-east India. Such a policy may be a temporary expedient, certainly not a permanent solution of the problem of the strategically sensitive frontier. Security reasons made it necessary for Nehru's government to concede to the demands of the Nagas, but he left the boundary issue a festering sore which had enabled the Nagas to make rapid strides to the fulfilment of their ultimate goal, 'Greater Nagaland'. The Boros were granted autonomy without delimitation of the BAC area, the result had been insurgency is gaining ground in Boro-dominated areas. A timely action of the Union government would have saved the ill-fated Chakmas from being the victims of the wrath of the Arunachalis in the north. The policy of the government should be conciliatory but must be firm. There can be no objection to persuasion, negotiations and conciliation even to the utmost, but it should not be one of appeasement which is a sign of weakness. If conciliation fails, the recalcitrants must be brought under control with an iron hand and in the process the innocent should not be punished along with the guilty; their lives and properties must be protected. Every endeavour must be made to earn the good will and support of the people to the policy of the government.

Dark Clouds in North-East

The death of Hiteswar Saikia, 20 April 1996, ended the eventful career of the most controversial political leader in Assam during the period under review. He is placed by many on a high pedestal as the 'Man of the Year' (1992), *mastakamani* (jewel of the hair), that he had 'carried in his veins' 'the spiritual heritage of Lachit Barphukan', the most striking personality of Assam's history while others called him '*ganasatru*' (enemy of people), 'Badan Barphukan, a veritable quisling' who invited the Burmese invaders into Assam¹. Doubtless Saikia was a man of action—a dynamic personality who proved his worth more than his predecessors in making his voice heard in the corridors of power in Delhi. He got the sanction of the Centre for the dry port of Guwahati which removed the grievance of the Assamese that West Bengal was collecting revenue on tea produced in Assam and the enhancement of oil-royalty to over rupees five hundred, another long-standing demand. It redounds to his credit in having clearance of the Union government of the two Universities of Tezpur and Cachar (Assam University), an IIT (North Guwahati), an additional refinery (Numaligarh) and a gas-cracker plant (Tengakhat, Dibrugarh district). He also secured from the Centre the pattern of ninety per cent government grant and ten per cent loan for accelerating the process of development, although decks had been cleared reportedly by the previous government. True, government under Saikia wiped out debt liabilities to the extent of over four thousand crores, but left a heavier burden of about six thousand crores to his successors.² He had also the credit of bringing a section of the ULFA overground, but created the problem of law and order by allowing the surrendered militants to make use of the clandestine arms in their possession. Saikia's government was neither clean nor honest. It was sullied by the multi-crore LOC scam, Operation Blackboard scandal and selling of jobs under the government even of school teachers at the lowest level.

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1. Bora, M.N., '*Hites war Saikia*', 26., Sarma, Sula, eds. '*Miles to Go... curtain Raiser on Hiteswar Saikia*,' Guwahati, 1983.
 2. Inderjit, 'Assam another Punjab or Kashmir', *The Assam-Tribune*, 16 September, 1990; *The Sentinel*, news item, 2 June 1995.

The Assam Accord, which has been considered as the *Magnacarta* of the people of Assam, appears to be the last item in the agenda of Saikia's government. Speaking of the delegation of opposition leaders in October 1994, S.B. Chavan, Home Minister, held the Assam government responsible for not being serious in implementation of the Accord and that unless foreigners were driven out from north-east, it would be difficult to tackle the multifarious problems of the region. The Home Minister was alive to the danger of unabated immigration and total failure of IM(DT) Act 1983 in the detection and deportation of illegal immigrants.³ If the Centre was really convinced of the nature and extent of the problem and its far reaching consequences necessary measures ought to have been taken to enforce the Foreigners Act, 1946, repealing the highly discriminatory IM (DT) Act 1983. In fact the Union government had 'abdicated its responsibilities' of detecting and deporting of foreigners not only in north-east but elsewhere in the country. In two metropolitan cities Bombay and Delhi, reportedly when the process of disenfranchisement was started, Muslim fundamentalists raising hue and cry of harassing the minorities compelled the Union government to suspend the 'Constitutional and legal action' on the plea of 'secularism'⁴. Apparently, New Delhi was not prepared to repeal nor even to amend the discriminatory Act which would be offensive to those who provide vote bank to the party in power even at the cost of integrity and sovereignty of the country.

The people of Assam had high hopes in the Chief Election Commissioner T. N. Seshan that he would be their saviour: that he would be able to remove the names of foreigners from voter's list. The CEC belied the expectations. He had no machinery of his own to check-up lakhs of names from the voter's list. He had to depend on the administrative and police officers under the command of a Chief Minister who was also to toe in the lines of those who raised him to his high office. In fact the sword of Damocles was hanging over his head. The day Saikia made a statement in Assam Assembly that in a single year thirty lakhs Bangladeshi infiltrators had entered Assam, the leader of the *Muslim Forum* threatened that unless the Chief Minister withdraws his statement, the Forum would

3. He found, out of 2,88,000 cases only 25,444 had been referred to the tribunal for detection and necessary action and out of this the tribunal originally identified 8,871 cases and 1,219 has been deported. Though a tip in the iceberg, it proved the presence of innumerable Bangladeshis in Assam and IM(DT) Act is an impediment to the process of detection and deportation. Editorial, *The Home Link*, 20 August 1994. *The Sentinel*, 3 August, 1994.

4. 'Piloting a Perspective', editorial, *The Home Link*, 13 August, 1994.

pull him down in five minutes. The Assam Chief Minister had no alternative but to retract from what he had said : *that there is not a single foreigner in Assam.*⁵ Since then he had been harping on the same tune and following a policy of appeasement of the religious minorities by announcing reservation of jobs under the government in accordance with population pattern breaking up thereby harmonious and composite character of Assamese society and opening up for migrants riverine (*char*) areas, forests and tribal belts and legitimising these by issuing *pattas*. These 'anti-people and anti-national' activities would not have been possible but for the co-operation and help the Chief Minister received from a coterie of the senior but servile civil servants who had 'no constitutional obligation to save Congress-I government in Assam at the cost of handing over the State to Bangladesh.'⁶ Saikia was indeed a victim of circumstances and no less of his own folly.

In his Press Conference at Guwahati on 13 October 1995, C.M. Shafi, High Commissioner Bangladesh, declared that it was not the policy of his government to encourage infiltration and categorically denied that influx of Bangladeshi national into India was taking place. 'How can I accept that there were lakhs of Bangladeshis here when the Assam Chief Minister denied the presence of illegal Bangladeshi here'.⁷ The religious *Census* of 1991 had exploded the myth that there is not a single foreigner in Assam. The *census* exhibits an 'unusual growth' of Muslim population from 35.92 to 63.73 lakhs, 77.42 per cent as against 41.89 per cent of the Hindus.⁸ The population growth during 1961-91 is 105'72 percent and the corresponding increase in the number of voters during 1962-91 is 139'95. Apparently there has been large scale infiltration of Muslim migrants from across the border inasmuch as the natural growth of Muslims in Assam would have been 45 per cent as against 42 per cent of the Hindus on previous two decades. Therefore, a large difference of 32 per cent between the actual growth and the estimated natural growth rate might have been contributed by illegal migrants, otherwise Muslim population

5. *The Sentinel*, 6 August, 1994; Prabhakara, 'A Statement', *Frontline*, 17 July 1992, 39.

6. *Ibid.*, 'Of Illusion and Reality'. 14 December, 1994. For fear of retribution, four top bureaucrats Chief Secretary Arunodoy Bhattacharyya, IGP (Law and Order), Ashim Roy, Secretary (Personnel), Niranjana Ghosh and DGP Ranju Das left the State on the eve of new AGP-led government came to power.

7. *Ibid.*, 14 October, 1995.

8. Computed by DDE Unit: DCO ASSAM, also Bhuyan, J.N. 'Religious Community of India'. *The Sentinel*, 24 July, 1995 ; 'Population Growth in Assam', *The Assam Tribune, Supplement*, 14 August 1997.

in Assam would have been about 52 lakhs in 1991 through a natural process as against 35.92 lakh in 1971. Evidently, as J. N. Bhuyan rightly maintains, excess of eleven and half lakhs over the estimated figure is by and large immigrants from Bangladesh; migrants from other parts of India is nominal.

Influx of immigrants into Assam is inevitable. The density of population of neighbouring Bangladesh is highest in the world. The pressure on land, diluvium and a stagnant economy had forced the Bangladeshis to cross the porous border with the aid of *dalals* or touts on either sides at varying rates 'depending on difficulties of crossings and means of the migrant.' Though the other side of the border is economically not much better, it provided the migrants all that they wanted—land and employment as labourers in farms, construction and domestic works.⁹ If the influx of immigrants remain unabated even at the present rate it is only a question of time when indigenous Assamese will be alien in their own homeland and the possibilities of their being ruled by foreigners cannot be ruled out. 'With their multiplication', in the words of a political observer,

Within fifty years they will form the majority in Assam. The next step will be a referendum on merger with Bangladesh. With Assam gone India will have no land link with the rest of North-east India. What with insurgency in some areas and what with snapping of the land-link, North-eastern India will be lost to India.¹⁰

Indian Government should endeavour, suggestions had been made,¹¹ in co-operation with Bangladesh government, South-East Asian Countries and International agencies to the growth and development of Bangladesh economy and taking up projects 'to secure lands of Bangladesh from flood water that destroy crops, reduce land-holding, increase poverty, and eventually force people to leave'. Stress must also be laid by the State government in successive plans on soil conservation, irrigation and river valley projects of the Tsangpo-Brahmaputra-Barak basins for the protection of both the valleys and Bangladesh from the recurrence of floods. The Brahmaputra Board constituted for the purpose in 1980 by an Act in

9. Chaudhury, K, 'Influence Unbound: Problem of the Indo-Bangladesh Border'. *Frontline*, 6 November 1992, 24-5.

10. *The Assam Tribune*, 17 August 1985.

11. Hazarika, Sanjoy, 'How to solve Illegal Migration Issue, *India Abroad*', New York, 13 November 1992.

Parliament utterly failed to deliver goods. It took as many as fifteen years to make ready the preliminary report and nothing is said in it of implementation nor of the funds. Without foreign collaboration it is too much to expect of the Board to undertake a project involving thousands of crores of rupees. Needless to say, it will curb effectively inflow of the immigrants and minimise expenditure on security and defensive measures along Indo-Bangladesh border apart from boosting up the economy of the entire north-east region. This should receive the priority it deserves of the Union and the State government.

The problem of detection, dispersal and even deportation of infiltrators would not be a formidable one if the Centre and the State government tackled it with imagination, zeal and in time. We are well aware a large number of foreigners left the Indian soil following Indira-Mujib Agreement in 1972. A few more lakhs could have been distributed to other parts of the country if New Delhi had the political will and determination to give effect to the wishes of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi—‘if there were any foreigner, they would be sheltered elsewhere in the country, if the Assamese do not want them’. A large scale deportation of foreigners would produce not only country-wide reaction, but international complications. There is hardly any solution at present other than co-existence with those declared citizens under the Assam Accord (1985). The problem is now only of post-1971 infiltrators. It is neither possible nor desirable to have a witch-hunt. A census of pre-1971 migrants may be made by making an announcement to register themselves with local authorities within a specified date to have a Permanent National Register of Citizens (NRC) on the basis of documents relevant to residency as may be determined by a panel of judges or highly competent authority*. Citizenship certificate be issued to genuine settlers and identity cards to all voters after proper verification. Birth and death registers be maintained and regularly checked up at all levels—towns, villages and blocks.

To prevent immigration through waterways to the *char* areas, the river police force must be made effective. Colonies of ethnic groups inimical to the Bangladeshis may be set-up along the whole line of the frontier. Sealing of the porous border by roads and barbed-wire fencing

* NRC should be the basis for scrutiny of non-citizens. A complaint can be lodged to the competent authority by any citizen that a particular person in the Register is not a citizen. The enquiry should be instituted, for which a tribunal may be set-up in each or a group of constituencies. There should be also an appropriate authority at the State level and its verdict should be final.

will not be an effective proposition. 'There is no border like this which zig zags throughout the hills and dale, river and paddy fields and forests. Neither can it be clearly demarcated nor easily patrolled. Night crossings are easy, specially where path is eased by bribery'¹². Infiltrators could easily sneak into West Bengal and catch the next available train to Assam where IM(DT) Act grant them citizenship. A Central agency or the Government of Assam be authorised to check-up and even to reject certificates issued by the neighbouring States.

The protection of Indian citizens whether of the Hindus and the Muslims being the only objective of the detection and deportation, there can hardly be any question of discrimination and harassment of the minorities : for their survival, the new-comers themselves should come forward to free the country of infiltrators. Therefore, the discriminatory IM(DT) Act must be scrapped or drastically amended and aliens deported under Foreigners Act 1946 as elsewhere in the country, for likes must be treated alike. There can be no objection as demanded by the AASU the revision of the incorrect electoral rolls *once for all* at the earliest. On the eve of the last election student leaders were assured by T.N. Seshan, Chief Election Commissioner, that electoral rolls will undergo intensive revision with January 1997 as the cut off date.

No attempt whatever has been made so far in updating the NRC nor of the repeal of the IM(DT) Act indispensably necessary for an intensive revision of the rolls. T. N. Seshan had retired and it is unlikely his successor would take up a measure not in the agenda of the newly-constituted United Front government.¹³ In its election manifesto Congress-I government was determined to ensure the continuance of the IM(DT) Act as it was designed to assist the deportation of foreign nationals and to protect them from unnecessary harassment. CPI(M) was not so much concerned with the Act as with the stopping of the discriminatory inflow of infiltrators and detection of foreigners with 1971 as the cut-off year.¹⁴ Curiously enough, the AGP which had come to power in 1985 'solely' on

12. Hazarika, *op. cit.*, 327-8.

13. This is borne out by the pro-Bangladeshi stance of Mulayam Sing Jadav, the Defence Minister of the United Front Government, when he wondered why the BJP was making a fuss about immigrants from Bangladesh and said that India would be able to prosper in the real sense if there was a federation of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. 'Communalists and opportunists clash', *The Sentinel*, 29 May, 1996.

14. *The Sentinel*, editorial, 24 April 1996; *The Statesman*, 18 February 1996.

the foreigner's issue, though assured in its manifesto full implementation of the Accord, made no mention of the core clauses 5.1 to 5.9.¹⁵ Nor did it make the repeal of the IM(DT) Act a pre-condition in its joining with the United Front government at the Centre. As a sop to AASU and others, it sought to have a new enactment to deal with foreigner's issue in spite of the existence Foreigner's Act 1946 which had served so well in other parts of the country. BJP, the Assam unit, was the only party which had committed in its manifesto scrapping of the IM(DT) Act and updating NRC for an intensive revision of the electoral rolls.¹⁶ At the national level, too, the party considered unchecked infiltrations as the major problem facing the country and seeks to solve it by necessary enactment apart from stringent measures to curb unchecked infiltration.¹⁷ Such a move on the part of the BJP is not likely to be materialised unless the party has the necessary strength in the Parliament to repeal the discriminatory Act.

The Prime Minister Deve Gowda, assured the people of Assam during his visit to Guwahati on 27 October 1996 that IM(DT) Act 1993 would be scrapped and prior to it Indrajit Gupta, Home Minister, also made a statement that the Centre was 'actively considering' the repeal of the discriminatory Act as it had failed in its objectives of identifying illegal immigrants in Assam. There was not much euphoria on these utterances on the uncertainties whether the Centre had the political will to push through the necessary legislative measure in the Parliament in the teeth of opposition of the Congress I whose support was indispensable for the United Front government for its very survival¹⁸. In fact the Prime Minister

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15. It had become extremely difficult for the AGP-led government to implement the crucial clauses of the Accord as it had to carry with its alliance partners. Abdul Muhib Majumdar, leader United People's Party (UPPA) and a Cabinet Minister, who was in fact the architect of this discriminatory piece of legislation, had considered IM(DT) Act as an 'irrelevant' issue and its repeal did not find place in the Assam Accord. He even threatened that his party would 'reconsider its support', if the Chief Minister pressed for the repeal of the Act (*The Sentinel* 20 May, 15 September 1996).
 16. 'BJP move on IM(DT) Act', *ibid.*, 26 July 1996.
 17. These include apart from detection, deportation and disenfranchisement of foreigners, updatation of NRC, electrified fencing along Indo-Bangladesh border, checking up of riverine infiltrators, annulment of property deals between Indians and foreigners and a close monitoring of foreign funds flowing into India to ensure that such funds cannot be used for anti-national activities.
 18. The Congress Working Committee's resolution on 4 November 1996 categorically opposed United Front government's move to repeal the IM(DT) Act in the forthcoming winter session of the Parliament, adding that repeal of the Act would be construed 'as abject surrender to the pressure of the BJP'.

had made a *volte face* on 26 November 1996 when he declared 'repeal of this Act will not arise without taking the whole house into confidence'.

A solution of the problem of foreign nationals is apparently extremely bleak. If the inflow of infiltrators remain unabated even at the present rate it will be only a question of time when the indigenous Assamese will be alien in their own home and even if the problem of foreigners receives a solution it is apprehended unending influx of outsiders will adversely affect the fortunes of the Assamese, nay their very identity will be lost to posterity. As a panacea suggestions had been made to declare Assam as a 'tribal' State or with modification Art 370 of the Constitution be extended to Assam. Undoubtedly, with spectacular advance in trade and industrial activities during last few decades there had been a tremendous influx of migrants from other parts of the country into the urban areas and industrial centres of Assam. While there has been a shrinkage in the area of the State, the population is on the increase in geometrical progression. This has created a demographic imbalance compelling many to leave their hearths and homes and closing to them to a great extent the avenues of employment. Art 19(1) (c) and (g) of the Constitution concedes the right of the Indian citizens to reside, settle and carry on any occupation anywhere in the country. The *Tewari Commission* recommended: 'Assam should be granted special protection as Kashmir where no real estate can be acquired by or sold to an outsider, to protect the interest of the local people.' Therefore, all that can be done to safeguard the interest of the indigenous people is not to declare Assam 'tribal', but to introduce, gradually, as a special case, select provisions of the Sixth Schedule particularly alienation of land and jobs under the government. To maintain the identity of the Assamese time has also arrived to give serious thought on reservation of seats in the Assembly to the original inhabitants, say all those citizens prior to 1951. This is in conformity with the Assam Accord (clause 6) which promised 'to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.'

Art 370 is not the answer for the protection of the Assamese interests nor preservation of their cultural entity. If that be so the provision would have been demanded by all the States since the need for preservation of cultural identity is common to all. Experience shows that the article has become an instrument of exploitation in the hands of the ruling oligarchy and vested interests. Above all, 'it feeds forces of parochialism, acts as a breeding ground of separatist tendencies and gives rise to tensions and conflicts'.

In early 1995, reviewing the growing insecurity of the north-east, Lieutenant General G.P. Kaushik, Chief of the Staff, Eastern Command, had claimed that the situation in Assam was much better than compared to Manipur and Nagaland. The ULFA and Boro militants had been controlled to a great extent though they were capable of creating problems. North Cachar Hills continue to cause serious anxiety of the government as the insurgents from Manipur and Nagaland had made the district their base of operations.¹⁹ Admittedly, insurgency of Manipur and Nagaland had drifted from bad to worse, but in the Valley of the Brahmaputra, too, it was a lull before the storm. ULFA militants were crippled, but not crushed. Stung by a division in its cadre and refusal of the NSCN to include it in the newly-formed SDUF following its 'dwindling credibility', ULFA leadership made a concerted effort to strengthen the organisation to emerge as one of the leading 'Revolutionary Force' in north-east. Reportedly they managed to smuggle large quantities of arms and ammunitions despite reverses in *Operation Golden Bird* a few months back on Mizoram-Myanmar border.²⁰ They started regrouping themselves in different parts of the Valley and neighbouring States. Already they had entered into Guwahati and settling down in Bhutan border and neighbouring hills despite round-the clock vigilance of the security forces.²¹ The spontaneous response to their *bandh* calls amply demonstrated that they were still active disproving official version that ULFA 'had its backbone broken.'²²

The Army top brass did not give due cognizance of the emergence of the 'diabolical force'—the surrendered ULFA or SULFA. Blessed by the ruling authority and in possession of 'clandestine arms' they were above law to indulge in anti-social activities,²³ and professing allegiance to none but the party in power and in fact they became 'private army' for Congress

19. *The Sentinel*, 27 June 1995.

20. *Ibid.*, 22 June 1995; Fifty insurgents belonging to a mixed group of 250 strong contingent were believed to have been killed in a pincer movement by the Indian Army along the International border in south Mizoram. *The Statesman*, 15 May 1995.

21. *Ibid.*, 31 May 1995.

22. *Ibid.*, 22 June 1995.

23. A list of blackmailing, looting, extortions and assaults may be seen in Brihaspati, 'Our Angels fallen from Heaven'. *The Sentinel*, 9 August 1995, also editorials 19 December, 1995, 25 May 1996.

I to fight for election.²⁴ Much harm had already been done by the outfit by giving wrong signals to the rising youths that violence alone would be good and five-star life style will be within their reach with the cult of gun and not by hard work.

The death of Hiteswar Saikia left a void in the political leadership followed by a spurt in activities of the banned extremist outfits. Intelligence reports suggested on the eve of 1996 election that both ULFA and BrSF, being scattered by Army operations were regrouping and arms were being smuggled in across the border State while the State government 'kept its fingers crossed'.²⁵ Reports were forthcoming from Nalbari, Bongaigaon and Morigaon districts of ULFA distributing pamphlets calling for a struggle for 'Independence' and hoisting party flags on the top of State government buildings to mark outfit's fifteenth anniversary.²⁶

A pamphlet issued by the Darrang district unit of the underground outfit expressed its willingness indirectly to participate in the election and made it clear that it was not opposed to negotiations. 'We are not an anti-talk group, but are against compromise in the name of dialogue'. The pamphlet was issued, it was not unlikely, *firstly* to lure the government to mollify the 'iron-dragnet' around them, *secondly* to ensure the end of Congress I rule in Assam to saddle its mentor AGP in power as preliminary to launch its operation against 'Indian imperialism'. Reportedly top brass had negotiations with AGP to leave at least 20 Assembly seats for their supporters.²⁷ Accordingly BrSF and ULFA activists participated in the polls in their own way supporting their own candidates. In Boro dominated areas, Kokrajhar to Udalguri, by and large candidates were pressurised to withdraw their nomination. A candidate at Margherita was gunned down by alleged ULFA activists while a former Minister of Assam was shot dead before the counting of votes on the Golaghat-Merapani road. NSCN was supposed to have a hand in this killing. There had been

24. *Ibid.*, editorial, 8 August 1995: Siddhartha Phukan, formerly Publicity Secretary ULFA, said that they were working for the Congress I candidates in the Guwahati Municipal election and will give conditional support for the ensuing Assembly polls *cf. supra*, 84.

25. A ship carrying a large cache of highly sophisticated arms for ULFA was intercepted by Bangladesh Security personnel off the island near Cox Bazar. Arms and ammunition shipped from Bangkok were smuggled to Mizoram and thence to Assam, *The Statesman*, 2 May 1996.

26. *The Statesman*, 25 April, 1996.

27. Mitra, Debasis 'ULFA's Game-plan' *The Statesman*, 22 January 1996.

in addition over half a dozen of ULFA attacks on Army personnel including Lieut. Devendra Tyagi just outside the Kamakhya temple.²⁸

In the election the Congress I was voted out and Prafulla Mahanta formed the AGP-led coalition government. Hardly had he been sworn in when Mahanta had to confront with a 'violent situation' in the wake of ethnic conflicts in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts, killings of Tinsukia district Superintendent of Police, Assam-Nagaland border and the eminent journalist Parag Das. If the situation was allowed to deteriorate further there was every likelihood of extension of Article 356, i.e., a spell of President rule in Assam. Mahanta had no other option but to persist in operation of the armed forces recalled by his predecessor, for which he had been subjected to severe criticisms²⁹. All the more, during election campaign Mahanta bitterly criticised Congress I government's Army operations as 'redundant'.³⁰ To the critics the ghost of Saikia continued and that Mahanta had betrayed the electorate by giving a free hand to the Army. On the other hand, it has been argued that ULFA itself was responsible for the deployment of the Army as it had made the gun-culture so widespread among the youths that it was no longer possible for the police alone to tackle the widespread killings, extortions, abductions and general lawlessness in the State with their antiquated weapons.³¹ Mahanta was well aware until the Army was able to carry out its difficult objectives without let or hindrance there will be no improvement in the situation. He made it clear that it will remain as long as killings, extortions and kidnappings continue in the region.³² Needless to say, a government worth the name must ensure the security of life and property of its citizens. If it lacks the necessary resources, both in men and arms, there can hardly be any objection to procure these from wherever possible. Under no circumstances can it endanger the lives and properties of those under its care.

Allegations had been made of 'repression, harassment and humiliation' of peaceful citizens by military personnel empowered as they

28. *Ibid.*, 26 April 1996; *The Sentinel*, 2, 6, May, 27 June 1996.

29. *The Sentinel*, 2 May 1996: 'CM seeks more Central Forces', 6 July 1996.

30. Mahanta's anti-Army stance, according to media, emboldened the ULFA militants to send a clear message that they will continue violence unless the troops were withdrawn. 'Lesson for Mahanta' *The Statesman*, editorial, 3 July 1996.

31. *Ibid.*, 7 June, 1996.

32. *The Statesman*, *op. cit.*

are by the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 'to shoot to kill and protect themselves for any act carried out under its provisions'. As a remedy, *The Unified Command* was introduced on 20th January 1997 to conduct counter-insurgency operations jointly by the Army, paramilitary forces and the State police co-ordinated and monitored by the Chief Secretary and the GOC, Four Corps.³³ Apart from cordoning off the militant outfits who had encamped themselves in the Bhutan borders, the GOC claimed that 'the Security forces were able to capture 204 ULFA militants and 69 Bodo militants during the three months of operations in comparison to 68 ULFA and 41 Bodo ultras held during the three months preceding it.' Complaints had been made, on the otherhand, even by the Amnesty International against Armed personnel of killing civilians including women and children apart from suspected insurgent groups. While calling upon the ultras to refrain from killings and abductions, it had appealed to the Army to fulfil its obligations, under international law to respect and uphold the human rights of all people.^{33a} Suggestions had been made to set-up grievance cells and to organise public relations meetings to improve relations with Army personnel both in urban and rural areas. Punitive measures must also be taken against Army excesses and made known to the public.

It is indeed heartening that the AGP-led government had realised the urgency of the seizure of all clandestine arms in possession of anti-social elements including the SULFA for the restoration of law and order in the State. The State government had asked all those in possession of such arms to return within a time limit, failing which threatened to take deterrent measures against the defaulters.³⁴ The time limit is already over; no report is forthcoming as to the surrender of illegal arms. It is also doubtful if the government was in possession of authentic information as to the bonafidés of the cadres and how many of these were in possession of sophisticated weapons.

Mahanta government announced that doors were always open for a dialogue with the ultras as a means to restore peace and normalcy in the State.³⁵ Activists in Upper Assam, according to available sources, were in

33. 'Unified and Endorsed', *The Sentinel*, 7 January 1997.

33a. 'Army, excesses in N-E has official sanction: Amnesty', *The Indian Express*, 13 April 1997; 'Army in the North-east', 18 April 1997.

34. *The Sentinel*, 29 May, 1996.

35. *Ibid.*

favour of talks with the Centre to find out a solution of all the problems, but those in lower part of the Valley stood opposed to peaceful negotiations. On 23 January 1996, the Central Publicity Secretary ULFA issued a statement that the outfit was not prepared to start any negotiation at a time when illegal operations were going on in many part of the State. Further he warned the intellectuals in non-cooperating in their armed struggle and for not opposing Army operations in Upper Assam.³⁶ When the Assam Chief Minister made a further appeal that the extremist outfit should come forward to the talks without any condition, he was told in reply that talks with the Union government may be possible in a foreign venue in presence of U.N. representatives and on sovereignty of Assam.³⁷ In spite of this rebuff, Mahanta invited ULFA leadership to the negotiating table in the larger interest of the region.³⁸ Will the extremists accept the olive branch extended by the Assam Chief Minister ?

The answer will be an emphatic no. as matters stand at present. ULFA's links with NSCN renders it difficult for the outfit from holding separate talk with the government.³⁹ In fact there had been escalation of the activities of the militant outfits since early August 1996 with heavy casualties which included ABSU President moderate Swambla Basumatary, Deputy Commander of CRPF at Guwahati and over a dozen of *jawans* and Army personnel at Nalbari and Sibsagar districts. Intelligence agencies believed that the ISI which had been spurring subversive activities supplied the ultras plastic explosives including RDX to carry out heaviest casualties with devastating results. The State government and the Army authorities under orders of the Centre had been forced to make an all out effort to curb insurgency by large scale operations.⁴⁰

Since Sheikh Hasina Wazed came to power in Bangladesh Indo-Bangladesh relationship considerably improved. Both the countries had agreed not to extend help to any foreign insurgent outfit operating from the other country. Bangladesh had already warned all anti-social elements

36. *Ibid.*, editorial, 'For ending All Violence'. 26 June 1996.

37. ULFA's terms for talks with government', *The Statesman*, 19 June, 1996.

38. 'CM offers unconditional talks', *The Sentinel*, 20 July 1996.

39. *The Sentinel*, news item, 16 June 1996 : Strengthened by the support of the IBRF, the apex body of the insurgents, had to face a similar situation in January 1992 when Arabinda Rajkhowa refused to respond to the call of the moderates; *The Statesman*, editorial, 12 August 1996.

40. *The Sentinel*, 25 August, 1 September 1996.

active in India and operating from Bangladesh to vacate Bangladesh within a time limit. Since then groups like ULFA, PLA, NSCN, ATTf and BrSF who received protection under former (BNP) government found their camps in the jungles of Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) dismantled and been forced to move back to India.⁴¹ ULFA had concentrated in the borders of Bhutan wherefrom it is understood to be exploring possibilities of importing cheaper and sophisticated weapons from former Soviet Republics since import of arms through Bangladesh had become hazardous.⁴² To augment 'war-Chest', ULFA militants have made demands of 'taxes' from officials and businessmen at Nalbari, Nagaon and Guwahati.⁴³ The Chairman Arbinda Rajkhowa declared in April 1997: 'We will fight to our last soldier. And if the neighbouring countries stop helping us out of fear of India, then the Assamese people will have to fight alone.'⁴⁴

Notwithstanding the Tripartite Accord, February 1993, the situation in the Boro-dominated areas continued to be explosive. The BrSF had made the Manas sanctuary their sole preserve which provided them a safe passage to Bhutan wherein they were reported to have set up training camps. They had been killing indiscriminately rhinos, tigers and other animals selling horns, skins to have funds to buy arms. In early 1990 the deployment of the Eastern Frontier Rifles in the reserve checked militant activities to some extent; with their withdrawal the areas once again became the hideout of the guerrillas. In the following year *Operation Kranti* was entrusted by the Union government to flush out the militants

41. 'Dacca has busted 18 militant camps' ; *The Sentinel*, 24 February, 1997; 'Ultras on the run in Bangladesh', 11 April 1997.

Bangla intellectuals apart from Bangladesh National Party (BNP), Jammiat-e-Islami and Jatiya Party of General Ershad stoutely opposed Sheikh Hasina government's policy towards North-east insurgents. In a seminar organised by the Centre for Research and Analysis on 'Freedom movements in India's North-East and Bangladesh Security' held in Dhaka on 27th January 1997, the participants came down heavily on the Hasina government's 'betrayal' towards ULFA, BrSF, NSCN and 'Kowtowing to the dictates of India'. The policy towards the North-East insurgents will definitely be altered in the event BNP fundamentalists again come to power in Dhaka. 'Bangladesh opposition helping N-E militants', *The Sentinel*, 3 April 1997; 'Bangladesh Intellectuals back N.E insurgents', *The Indian Express*, 20 April 1997.

42. 'ULFA in Bhutan border', *The Sentinel*, 3, 11 September, 1996; 'Ultras move to Bhutan', *ibid*, 3 March 1997.

43. 'Extortion trigger on Exodus', *The Sentinel*, 7 January 1997; *The Dainik Asom*, 21 December, 1996.

44. 'ULFA playing mind games: Army'. *The Indian Express*, 13 April 1997.

from the sanctuary. The presence of the Army was a 'temporary deterrent'; once they were moved out the militants were active in the region.⁴⁵

The timely arrival of the security forces brought under control the ethnic clashes in 1994, but the tragic events showed the supremacy of the BrSF over the moderates. Since then the militants, at times jointly with the ULFA outfits, were very active and their extortions, abductions and attacks on the security forces remained unabated.⁴⁶ Though most of the abducted persons had been released presumably on receipt of ransom, some of the them were kept as hostages. Despite presence of the Punjab Police Commandos and the security forces, BrSF intensified their operations and killed several persons at Ambari in the Nalbari district. In early May 1996 ethnic clashes between the Boro and the *Adivasis* (Santhals) in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts not less than 150 lost their lives, innumerable villages set on fire and over two lakhs rendered homeless.⁴⁷ The timely arrival of reinforcement though brought the situation under control sporadic incidents continued⁴⁸ and the refugees dared not to repair back their villages for fear of being attacked by the BrSF. This has been interpreted as continuation of the 'cleansing process' started by the militants in 1994 to make BAC area free of non-Boros.⁴⁹

Already there had been a concerted move of the Boro leadership for separate Statehood by eliminating dissidents on the Boroland issue and the organisation of a strong forum to launch the movement for the attainment of the ultimate goal. Under S.K. Bwismutiyari there had emerged in 1995 the *Boroland People's Movement Council* (BPMC), and this was soon replaced by *Boro People's Statehood Movement Council* (BPSMC) to fight for the demand of separate Statehood.⁵⁰ With similar

45. Chaudhury, Kalyan, 'The Army Option', *Frontline*, 28 August 1994, 33-4.

46. *The Sentinel*, 27 June, 7 July, 8 September. *The Statesman*, 9 September 1995.

47. *The Sentinel*, 28 March 1996, 22 May 1996.

48. While Boro-Santhal conflict was simmering, violence erupted again at Kokrajhar on 19 November 1996 which left 13 dead and many injured followed by large scale arson in several villages demanding the despatch of para-military forces to the affected areas.

49. The *All India Santhal National Conference* (AISNC) held the BrSF entirely responsible for making a concerted effort 'to pull off an ethnic purge' by evicting the Santhals and Muslims from the operational headquarters in Kokrajhar. At a press conference on 6 June AISNC said, 'Bodo extremist had systematically stockpiled sophisticated arms over five-years with the object of ethnic cleansing. *Ibid.*, 7 June 1996.

50. *The Sentinel*, 28 March, 1996.

objectives Prem Singh Brahma formed the *Boro Tiger Front* disillusioned as he was of the inordinate delay in the election to the BAC. He threatened even to withdraw his support to Congress I if election was not held before the Assembly polls in early 1996.⁵¹ Boro Security Force, rechristened as *National Democratic Front* (NDF), in the meanwhile desired all Boro parties to dissolve their respective organisations and form an united front in the larger interest of the Boro people. Bwismutiary dissolved his party forthwith and Prem Singh for his very survival had to join the newly constituted *National Democratic Front*. He was well aware of the anomalous position in continuing his link with a party, namely the Congress I, that had earned nothing but wrath of the Boro people.⁵²

Nonetheless, Brahma faction kept open the door for negotiation. The Assam Chief Minister Saikia was told that if the government accept their demand of 400 odd villages and about 40 tea-gardens in the north bank lying within 10 km. belt of the international border with Bhutan into BAC area to the satisfaction of the Boros, the leadership may consider the possibilities of restoring earlier ties with the Congress I.⁵³ Brahma had expected that Saikia would announce the acceptance of the Boro demands, but all that Saikia did was expression of his concern over the delay and assured him that he would speak to the Prime Minister. With the support of the seven million Koch-Rajbanshis who had been since granted Scheduled Tribes status Saikia was not so much concerned with the Boros as with the votes of the non-Boros and tea-tribes on the north bank of the Brahmaputra.⁵⁴

Brahma and Bwismutiary, both contested the election under the banner of BSMC with the support of the ABSU. They failed to make any dent on the electorate while Darrang-based *United Democratic Front* (UDF), under new nomenclature *People's Democratic Front*, (PDF) on the support of the BrSF bagged seven out of nine seats.⁵⁵ Holding the dominant position in Boro politics, PDF reiterated the demand for a separate Boro State (*Hadot*) within India besides fresh dialogue for the inclusion of the Boro-Kacharis of Karbi-Anglong district in Scheduled

51. *Ibid.*, 25 September 1995.

52. *Ibid.*, editorial, 'The Parting of ways', 4 March 1996.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*, 25 July 1996.

Tribes Status (Hills) and the creation of a Nilachal district in the south bank of the Brahmaputra. It expressed its regret for the failure of the government in forming a new executive council and called for the dissolution of the BAC to revive people's faith in the autonomous body.⁵⁶ In return for the support of the PDF, Mahanta government reconstituted the BAC despite opposition of a section of the agitation leaders. It will however be a problem for a government which had so long opposed to the granting of the autonomous district council under the Sixth Schedule, would concede the demand for a separate State in a region where it has the massive support of the Assamese people.⁵⁷

The ABSU had intensified the demand of Boroland following the announcement made by H.D. Deve Gowda, the Prime Minister, that Statehood demand of Uttarkhand would be conceded by necessary legislative measures in the Parliament. During his visit to Itanagar, 27 October 1996, when the Prime Minister ruled out the possibility of granting separate Statehood for the Boros on the ground the case of Boroland was not the same as Uttarkhand, ABSU President U. G. Brahma was greatly disappointed and declared that the movement would be hereafter 'vigorous and violent'⁵⁸ and likely 'to go beyond their control'.

The Union government, too, found it not easy to accept the demands of the Boros in toto.* Two ministries, Defence and Environment have been opposing the transfer of the belt and in their view the security of the country cannot be compromised.⁵⁹ The Centre is also no less concerned with the susceptibilities of the Bhutanese government which is apprehensive of Boro areas being extended on its international border. Over and above, the BrSF has already become a terror in the north with their mounting attacks on the non-Boros, particularly the minorities, while under the very nose of the BAC the militants have been collecting 'taxes' varying from five to fifty lakhs and failure to meet these demands has been followed by severe retribution.⁶⁰ What is the guarantee if on the

56. *The Statesman*, 12 April; *The Sentinel* 22 May, 25 July 1996.

57. *The Sentinel*, 17 June 1996.

58. *The Statesman*, 28 October 1996;

* 112 villages had been placed in the meantime under BAC jurisdiction, but this was unacceptable to Boro leaders.

59. Ray, Tapas, 'Bodo Accord', *Frontline*, 2 January 1996, 36-7.

60. 'Aboror oporat attyachar', *Ajir Asom*, 29 June, 1996.

saddle, following precedents of their counterparts in Tripura, Boro militants will not take over the tea-gardens in BAC area. Already, several tea companies operating in Boro-dominated areas received demands of Rs. 2500 hectare wise per annum from NDFB or face dire consequences. Therefore, the Centre will have to give serious thought before arriving at a decision on this sensitive issue. Unless there is mutual understanding and goodwill, with a spirit of give and take, security in Boro-dominated areas will be illusive.

61. *The Statesman*, editorial, 'Marxist must Act' 17 February 1995; *The Sentinel* 29 July, 19 September, 1997.

EPILOGUE

The scheme of autonomous units has created more problems than it seeks to solve. We are well aware that the Kacharis had a kingdom in the Dhansiri valley but there is hardly any evidence to show that the Boros had ever a principality of their own in the area covered in the Accord where the Koch-Rajbanshis, immigrant Muslims, *Adivasis* and Assamese caste Hindus constitute two-third of the population. Unless adequate safeguards are provided they will be relegated to the position of second class citizens and the 'cleansing operation' started in 1994 and is being repeated with mass killings is likely to be continued until the BAC area is purged of non-Boros. Friction will definitely arise on the language issue and in the newly-created Rabha Hasong unit which has overlapped the areas predominantly occupied by the Boros.¹ The Koch-Rajbanshis, too, sharply reacted over the declaration of Rabha-Hasong Council without consulting other tribes comprising majority in the area denying them their birth right in their own homeland.² Central intervention had already been sought by the *Tribal Front*, an umbrella organisation of the tribals, on the undefined boundary of Lalung and Mising autonomous units.³ In case the demands of the Ahoms or Koch-Rajbanshis are to be conceded the grant of autonomy to minor ethnic groups will have to be ruled out. In view of the claims and counter-claims, it would be a risky gamble on the part of the Union government to arrive at any decision with regard to autonomous units and their respective boundaries without ascertaining carefully the strength of claims of the contending groups.⁴

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1. 'Autonomy a Farce', *The Sentinel*, editorial, 24 July 1995. S.K. Bwismutiary opposed the autonomy plans mainly because of overlapping of the areas controlled by the Boros and the three tribes. To him autonomy with Mising, Rabhas and Lalung would be 'disastrous' for the Boros living in areas dominated by these tribes ignoring the fact that non-Boros are in a majority in BAC area. Representatives of these tribes namely *Rabha-Hasong Demand Committee*, *All Rabha Students' Union*, *Lalung Autonomous District Demand Committee* and the *Mising Students Union* reacting sharply had accused Bwismutiary of betraying 'broad tribal cause'. 'Autonomy Plan for three tribes runs into rough weather', *The Statesman*, 8 September 1995.
 2. *The Sentinel*, 6 April 1995.
 3. *The Statesman*, 25 May; *The Sentinel*, 7 August 1995.
 4. The disastrous consequences of the policy pursued by the government was brought to the notice of the Home Minister S. B. Chavan by the present writer in his note on 30 August 1994, and in reply he was told the matter was 'looked into'. I 1232-94-H. P.M: DO Chavan-Barpujari; 19 September 1994'. The policy of the government however remains unaltered.

The reorganisation of the North-Eastern States (1971) though served the interests of the privileged few, failed to fulfil the needs and aspirations of the people. It had alienated the people of the hills and plains giving rise to inefficiency, nepotism and corruption resulting in militancy and insurgency in different parts of the region. The ill-conceived 'divisive autonomy', too, destroyed the homogeneity and composite character of the greater Assamese society. A sense of deprivation and neglect, real or imaginary, had forced the Ahoms, Koch-Rajbanshis, Matak, Morans, Chutias to pull themselves down to entitle them to the benefits of the Scheduled Tribes. 'It is high time', rightly remarks Professor B. Pakem, 'that the terms like *Adivasis*, *Harijans*, Minorities, Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes be abolished from the administrative vocabulary of the country. There are many ways by which the State can come to the rescue of the economically disabled or socially deprived Indians.'⁵ Pressing demands of autonomy or self-determination had already been made in the country: Gurkhaland, Uttarkhand, Jharkhand, Vidarbha, Chattisgarh (MP), Telengana. Time is ripe to have a fresh look at the reorganisation of States on a rational basis and in any case for re-drafting of the Constitution to meet the problems of the ethnic groups which could not be anticipated by the authors of the Indian Constitution.

Insurgency in north-east is not likely to die out as over a dozen of guerrilla outfits are operating in the region. In Nagaland both the factions led by Muivah and Khaplang are in factional fights and several of the activists had already been killed. They are unprepared to share a common platform to iron out their mutual differences and also with the parent body Naga National Council.⁶ In the neighbouring State of Manipur apart the oldest outfits, the underground had been carrying on an armed struggle for secession of Manipur, as many as seven factions⁷ were trying to 'finish each other'. Vamuzo's resolution in the Nagaland Assembly, September 1994, for the integration of the Naga inhabited areas of Manipur, parts of

5. Pakem, B., 'Nationality question in Hill Areas of North-East India in *Regionalism in India*, 332.

6. The *Kangleipak* communist party consisted of K.C.P. (Ibohau) KCP (Ibopishak). There had been misunderstanding between UNLF and banned People's Liberation Army. All these organisations-UNLF, PREPAK (Khomba and Meiraba) KCP (Ibo and Ibo pi) were formed with the object of achieving an 'Independent' Manipur.

7. The *United Naga Council*, the apex body of the Nagas in Manipur, categorically stated. 'We reserve the right to take the decision affecting Nagas of Manipur and not on any other organisation.', *The Statesman*, 20 May 1995.

Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar had been interpreted by the Manipuris as a 'conspiracy to drive a wedge between the Nagas of Manipur and the Meiteis.'⁸

Factionalism rendered it difficult for the Boro militants to achieve their ultimate goal. In fact since the middle of 1996 a fratricidal war is in progress between the *Boro Security Force* and the newly emerged *Boro Liberation Tiger Force* (BLTE) cadres. Consequently the year 1996 had been a year of 'death, destruction and violence'. According to official statistics;

As many as 734 people lost their lives... of which 117 were either police, paramilitary or Army personnel. Almost a fourth, or 200 were killed in ethnic violence involving Bodos and Adivasi Santhals. The Bodo Security Force (BdSF) took the most scalps during the year with 98 killings, the ULFA killed 66 while the NSCN making intermittent incursions into the state gunned down 13.⁹

Again the year 1997 started with a series of explosions:

The Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF) triggered one explosion after another in the territory they intend to declare as Bodoland. Beginning from December 29, the BLTF blew up the Rakhaldubi bridge on National Highway 31 followed by blowing up of the New Delhi bound Brahmaputra Mail near Sessapani next-day and the destruction of a bridge near Goreswar on New Year's eve.

Insurgencies and ethnic conflicts and in their wake killings, kidnappings and extortions had hit hard and brought the development works to a standstill. Not to speak of new investments, there had been a flight of the capital adversely affecting the economic growth of the region. In May 1996, the sudden departure of the Japanese technocrats engaged in Kathalguri-hydel project amply demonstrated the adverse effects on industrial undertakings by the deteriorating law and other situation in the region. Small wonder that four US-based companies, as reported by UNI, though evinced keen interest in oil and power sectors, were apprehensive and sceptical about the political situation of Assam as well as north-eastern States.¹⁰ The Thoubal Multi-purpose project in Manipur is

8. *The Sentinel*, 23 November 1995.

9. '1996—A year of violence', *The Sentinel*, 9 January 1997.

10. *The Sentinel*, 18 July, 11 September 1996.

'languishing' over decades.¹¹ In May 1994, Oil and Natural Gas Commission had to stop all operations at Champang under orders of the Nagaland government though everything below the ground belong to the Union government. Again NSCN(I-M) outfits reportedly dismantled and carried away sections of the oil rigs in jungles of Tesezo and Hozukina in Naga Hills.¹² In Meghalaya, according to Central sources, government found it difficult to raise uranium on account of local resistance instigated by the ISI backed insurgents.¹³ It may not be too long similar hurdles will come up in other sectors including tea on which depends the fortunes of a major segment of the population nay of the State as a whole.

There is a consensus that military crackdown is not the answer to curb insurgency in north-east; that 'a political dialogue should be held,' said General Shankar Roy Chowdhury, Chief of the Army Staff: 'Never believe that men in uniform can solve what essentially are political problems; he can only play the catalyst, help to mark the process easier'.¹⁴ As a matter of fact in 1994 Ms Indira Gandhi invited NSCN to talk without any string but her death prevented to start a dialogue though Muviah's emissaries were on the way to Delhi. During Rajiv Gandhi's regime there could be no initiative because of late Prime Minister's tough stand on the question of territorial integrity. Narasimha Rao's offer of talk just on the eve of last election was construed as a political gimmick by the rebel leaders. To the offer of talk without any pre-condition by the Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, Muivah made it clear that the talk would be political and should be held at Bangkok or Hongkong.¹⁵ Political leaders and Chief Ministers of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur have also been repeating their appeals to the outlawed organisations in their respective States for the last few years, but the response received so far is far from encouraging. It would be too much to expect of the NSCN top brass to join the

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11. Lama, J.B., 'The Tasks in Manipur. Some thoughts priorities', *The Statesman*, 20 May 1995. In 1992 the construction of the dam had to be stopped on the destruction of the machinery worth two crores by the NSCN. The future depends whether the authorities would meet the claims of those whose lands would be submerged. It is feared a lion share of it would fall into the hands of the ultras if the government concede to their demand.
 12. *Ibid.*, 25 June 1995; *The Sentinel*, 16 May 1995.
 13. Ray, Tapas, 'Militancy and growing worries', *Frontline*, 20 September 1994, 28f. The Atomic Mineral division which had surveyed the uranium ores in the Domisariat area, west Khasi Hills, confirmed that the ores are of excellent quality. The opposition of the HNLF and the HSPDP had prevented the operation of the mines inspite of the fact that the State Minings and Geology Ministry was about to issue clearance to the Uranium Corporation of India Ltd. *The Statesman*, 18 November 1996.
 14. *The Statesman*, 25 May; *The Sentinel*, 28 September 1995 (RNS).
 15. *The Sentinel*, 6 November 1996.

mainstream like the ULFA boys following a negotiation. His life would be in constant threat from ethnic rivals if he comes overground.¹⁶ How can the dialogue with the rebels would be successful unless they are interested in these negotiations? The crux of the problem is the insurgents will spurn down all offer of peace talks within the framework of the Indian constitution. Their demand is return of Independence.¹⁷ Evidently, the prospect of peace in the North-east is remote.

Political unrest and turmoil in North-east has been compared with insurgency in Kashmir and the Punjab. With its multi-lingual and multi-ethnic groups and their conflicting interests, the problems of North-east cannot be compared with any other parts of India which are by and large homogenous. This has been compounded by the policy of drift consistently followed by the Union government which had brought about the present impasse. The insurgency in North-east is the symptom of the growing disease: the body politic of every State is rickety to the extreme with rampant corruption, disparity in income and total lack of industrial, agricultural and economic development which alone could have provided gainful employment to the disgruntled youths.

The alienation of the ethnic groups and growing insecurity of the sensitive and strategic North-east had made of late a marked departure from the earlier policy of the Union Government. There had been frequent visits of successive Prime Ministers and allocation of huge funds, for overall development of the entire region. Will the policy of the government remain unaltered with the change in leadership? In any case the war is to be waged at two fronts : terrorism and corruption from the top to the

16. Insurgency can be tackled politically; *The Statesman*, 20 May 1995; *The Sentinel*, 24 May 1995.

17. A Calcutta based weekly, *The Sunday* was told by Muivah that he was prepared to have the negotiations not peace talks. 'Indian contemporary rulers talk of unity, amidst diversity but they never like to leave a distinct society like ours surviving with its own peculiarities. It wants all areas of the sub-continent to conform to the value system of Aryavartas.' Small wonder that in the talk held at Zurich in Switzerland between 'dominant' insurgent group NSCN and Indian Prime Minister Deve Gowda, as stated by the Home Minister in the Rajya Sabha (14 May), yielded 'anything worthwhile' as the group refused to give up the demand of, secession from India: ('Gowda met NSCN (IM)', *The Sentinel* 15 May 1997. Likewise ULFA's demand for 'sovereign independent Assam remains unaltered despite frantic appeals for a dialogue by the political parties and intellectuals apart from Assam Chief Minister Profulla Mahanta. On the latest move of the Central officials to bring NSCN (I-M) to the negotiating table, Kughalu Mulatou, under Secretary Ministry of Information and Publicity of NSCN (K) branding NSCN (I-M) as 'reactions' made it clear that its topmost leadership would settle for nothing less than a sovereign Nagaland *The Sentinel*, August 1997.

bottom. This will necessarily demand a radical change in governance, if need be, by a spell of emergency, to curb effectively divisive and secessionist forces. This will smoothen the path for a government with accountability, corruption-free, transparent, dynamic, and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people.

Appendix-A

Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace Between India and Bangladesh, *March 19, 1972.* (*Excerpts*)

ARTICLE 1

The High Contracting Parties inspired by the ideals for which their respective peoples struggled and made sacrifices together, solemnly declare that there should be lasting peace and friendship between their two countries and their peoples, each side shall respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other and refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of the other side.

The High Contracting Parties shall further develop and strengthen the relations of friendship, good neighbourliness and all round cooperation existing between them, on the basis of the above-mentioned principles as well as the principles of equality and mutual benefit.

ARTICLE 2

Being guided by their devotion to the principles of equality of all peoples and States, irrespective of race or creed, the High Contracting Parties condemn colonialism and racialism in all forms and manifestations and are determined to strive for their final and complete elimination.

The High Contracting Parties shall cooperate with other States in achieving these aims and support the just aspirations of peoples in their struggle against colonialism and racial discrimination and for their national liberation.

ARTICLE 3

The High Contracting Parties reaffirm their faith in the policy of Non-Alignment and peaceful co-existence as important factors for easing tension in the world, maintaining international peace and security, and strengthening national sovereignty and independence.

ARTICLE 4

The High Contracting Parties shall maintain regular contacts with each other on major international problems affecting the interests of both States, through meetings and exchanges of views at all levels.

ARTICLE 5

The High Contracting Parties shall continue to strengthen and widen their mutually advantageous and all-round co-operation in the economic, scientific and technical fields. The two countries shall develop mutual co-operation in the fields of trade, transport and communications between them on the basis of the principles of equality, mutual benefit and the most favoured nation principle.

ARTICLE 6

The High Contracting Parties further agree to make joint studies and take joint action in the fields of flood control, river basin development and the development of hydro-electric power and irrigation.

ARTICLE 7

The High Contracting Parties shall promote relations in the fields of art, literature, education, culture, sports and health.

ARTICLE 8

In accordance with the ties of friendship existing between the two countries each of the High Contracting Parties solemnly declares that it shall not enter into or participate in any military alliance directed against the other party.

Each of the High Contracting Parties shall refrain from any aggression against the other party and shall not allow the use of its territory for committing any act that may cause military damage to or constitute a threat to the security of the other High Contracting Party.

ARTICLE 9

Each of the High Contracting Parties shall refrain from giving any assistance to any third party taking part in an armed conflict against the other party. In case either party is attacked or threatened with attack, the High Contracting Parties shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to take appropriate effective measures to eliminate the threat and thus ensure the peace and security of their countries.

ARTICLE 10

Each of the High Contracting Parties solemnly declares that, it shall not undertake any commitment, secret or open, toward one or more states which may be incompatible with the present Treaty.

ARTICLE 11

The present Treaty is signed for a term of twenty-five years and shall be subject to renewal by mutual agreement of the High Contracting Parties.

The Treaty shall come into force with immediate effect from the date of its signature.

ARTICLE 12

Any differences in interpreting articles of the present Treaty that may arise between the High Contracting Parties shall be settled on a bilateral basis by peaceful means in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding.

Done in Dacca on the Nineteenth Day of March Nineteen Hundred and Seventy Two.

Sd/-INDIRA GANDHI

Prime Minister,
For the Republic of India

Sd/-SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN

Prime Minister,
For the People's Republic of
Bangladesh.

Appendix - B

Memorandum

(Excerpts)

To

**The Prime Minister of India,
NEW DELHI.**

Hon'ble Prime Minister,

We, on behalf of All Assam Student's Union, hereby submit for your urgent attention the following Memorandum on the explosive issue of influx of foreign nationals into the North East Region, particularly Assam.

The problem which is agitating the minds of people of the entire North East Region is the problem of influx of foreigners from the neighbouring countries particularly Bangladesh and Nepal. The influx of foreign nationals into Assam is not a recent phenomenon. The problem exists from the days of independence. The problem has become so alarming that the very existence of the indigenous populations is threatened. But we are determined to preserve our identity, our history, our culture and our heritage in our strive to maintain the ethnic beauty of the people of North East Region.

The huge magnitude of the problem and the serious threat to the territorial integrity of the nation that this influx of foreign nationals poses is clearly revealed by the following figures :

Percentage of increase of population per decade :

Assam and India

Year	Population of Assam	%increase Assam	%increase India
1951	80,28,856	19.94	13.31
1961	108,37,329	34.98	21.64
1971	146,25,152	34.95	24.80

Assam tops the list of states which registered more than 50% increase during 1911-1961.

State	Rate of Increase
Andhra	67.8
Assam	174.0
Bihar	64.1
Gujarat	110.5
Jammu & Kashmir	55.3
Kerala	136.5
Madhya Pradesh	66.5
Madras	61.2
Maharashtra	84.2
Mysore	74.4
Orissa	54.2
Punjab	70.0
Rajasthan	83.5
Uttar Pradesh	53.2
West Bengal	94.0

Assam's Position Remained Unchanged Till 1971. We have Every Reason to Apprehend that the Next Census Would Definitely Maintain the Same Trend if not increase it.

As early as the 1930 important leaders like Nehru and Rajendra Prasad had expressed their concern at the continuing influx into Assam. They must have been alerted by the following table :

TREND IN POPULATION : ASSAM AND INDIA

% decadal variation

Year	Assam	India
1911	16.99	5.73
1921	20.47	6.30
1931	19.92	11.00

But that was a different story. India was then not divided. Following

partition of India, illegal immigration particularly from Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) and Nepal began on a scale larger than ever before.

The people of Assam have reasons, based on real experience to be apprehensive of being swamped by foreign nationals in the near future. Commenting on this large increase of 34.95% per decade compared with the national figure of 24.80% (one of the highest in the World), the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) said to duty during the Conference of the Electoral Officers held on 24-26 September, 1978 :

“The influx has become a regular feature. I think that it may not be a wrong assessment to make on the basis of this increase of 34.95% between the two census, the increase that is likely to be recorded in 1991 census would be more than 100% over the 1961 census. In other words, a state would be reached when the state may have to reckon with the Foreign Nationals who may in all probability constitute a sizeable percentage, if not the majority population in the state.”

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A silent invasion by foreign nationals from the neighbouring countries particularly Bangladesh and Nepal is taking place. We cannot remain silent spectators when sovereignty of India is attacked. The problem has been deliberately neglected by the leaders leaving the destiny of Assam at the mercy of foreign nationals. The foreign nationals pose challenge to the integrity of India.

The first thing foreign nationals try is to enrol their names in the voters' lists with the connivance of antisocial elements, politicians, and officials on this side of the border. The motive is crystal-clear. The infiltrators vote for the politicians who protect them in all respects. In fact politicians encourage infiltration to ensure their political survival. Therefore naturally the rapid growth in population of Assam as a result of large scale influx from the neighbouring countries is bound to be reflected also in the increasing number of electors in Assam from 1957 to 1979. The following figures fully reveal it.

Year	No. of electors	Increase	% of increase during the years	
1957	44,93,359			
1962	49,42,816	4,49,457	10%	(in 5 years)

1966	55,85,056	6,42,240	12.99% (in 4 years)
1970	57,01,805	1,16,749	2.09% (in 4 years)
1971	62,96,198	5,94,393	10.42% (in 1 year)
1977	72,29,543	9,33,345	14.82% (in 6 years)
1978	79,74,476	7,44,933	10.30% (in 1 year)
1979	85,37,497	5,63,021	7.06% (in 1 year)

xxx

xxx

xxx

xxx

Indian Constitution defines in unambiguous terms who can be a voter. A Foreign National cannot certainly participate in Indian Elections. But the sovereignty of the country has been openly insulted by the political parties. This is amply told by CEC :

Another disturbing factor is the demand made by the political parties for the inclusion in the electoral rolls of the names of such migrants who are not Indian Citizens, without even questioning and properly determining their citizenship status

The number of foreign nationals in Assam has already become explosive. The problem must be tackled with utmost speed. Foreign nationals whose presence is of grave concern to the people of Assam, are mainly from Bangladesh and Nepal. In addition to Bangladeshis, Nepalis who have entered Assam without Restricted Area Permits either from Nepal or from Bhutan account for a sizeable number of foreigners. The increase of Nepali immigrants in the last two decades cannot be ignored.

Nepali Immigration

Year	Persons	Decade variation	General variation Assam
1951	101,335	-	-
1961	182,925	48.1%	34.98%
1971	352,673	48.2%	34.95%

The percentage of increase of the Nepali population is higher by about 13% than the percentage of increase in the general population during the period 1951-1971.

The conclusion from all these figures is obvious. Variations in population and electorate have been abnormal. Only influx of

foreign nationals from neighbouring countries can account for such consequential changes.

Consequences of Unbridled Immigration :

The harmful effects of continuous immigration are evident in every sphere of life. Tensions in the social, political, economic and cultural fields have already surfaced and both Central and State Governments must act before it is too late. Attempts to develop the region industrially cannot succeed unless the record population growth due to influx is fully halted. Immigrants have created pressure, unprecedented in the modern World history, on every resource of the region.

The immigrants have gathered enough strength to influence many major decisions of the State Government overlooking the security of the State and the country. An innocent looking newspaper report that appeared in *The Statesman* on January 16, 1979 throws sufficient light on the threat to our sovereignty. It reads :

An off-shoot of this population explosion has been a sudden change in the composition of the district's (Goalpara) electorate. The immigrants are in absolute majority in seven of nineteen Assembly Constituencies in the district. In five more constituencies they are numerous enough to be crucial for an electoral victory. There is almost a similar transformation in the smaller border district of Cachar, which returns 15 legislators to the 126 members State Assembly.

It is quite possible that majority of immigrants and the leaders behind them are determined to create instability in the region to serve the interest of the foreign powers. No body can deny such a possibility. We are apprehensive of the Political realities since vote is central to our democratic structure. Those who vote and those who are elected are deemed to be invested with power and responsibility to safeguard Assam's political future within the framework of Indian Constitution. *The people of Assam have genuine reasons to believe that foreign nationals would injure Regional and National interest. Our neighbours in the Hill states share our fears.*

Threat to tribal existence

The problem has badly hit the tribal populations. All the 33 blocks and belts reserved for the tribal people are on the verge of extinction. Pressure on economy has reduced sizes of the reserved tribal blocks. Forest

resources are fast disappearing due to indiscriminate felling of trees and occupation of the area by the foreign nationals.

The very identity of tribal population is in danger of extinction. The recent history of Tripura provides a good example to substantiate our belief. People of Assam cannot afford to ignore the warning.

Different Phases of the Movement :

When appeals and requests to the State Government, Central Government and the President of India failed to evoke any response, the people of Assam had to come out to the streets. Thousands of meetings were organised throughout the State to educate the people. Rallies were held. Mass picketing and Mass *Satyagraha* received support of everybody with a sense of belongingness to the region. Non-cooperation was extremely successful. Will of the people made election in twelve constituencies impossible. Determination of the people prevailed over the unconstitutional directive of CEC. However, election machinery forced the election on the indigenous population in the two constituencies of Cachar. The representatives who are declared to be elected from Cachar district have natural obligation to protect the interest of foreigners. Foreign nationals have already out-numbered the Indians in Cachar district. The people of Assam registered due protest on January 21 by observing it as a Black Day.

The students of Assam have been agitating on the issue since 1974. The detection and deportation of foreign nationals were—our demands included in the 21 point Charter which was submitted to the State Government in 1974. Now we are determined to correct the mistakes of our previous generations.

Character of the Movement

We are committed to pursue the cause of the present movement with sense of deep conviction on the principle of non-violence, democracy and secularism. The people of Assam spontaneously responded to our call with a sense of discipline, solidarity with the movement is evident in every phase. Determination to maintain peace and harmony is written on the face of every body participating in the movement. Unfortunately state politicians created troubles at different places and many lives have been lost.

Active Conspiracy :

But conspiracy has been on. This only proves that foreign nationals are very active in the state politics. Political elements patronizing the foreign nationals are inflaming communal passions among the innocent people in the name of language and religion. Our firm answer has been a foreigner is a foreigner ; a foreigner shall not be judged by the language he speaks or by the religion he follows :

Conspirators in collusions with a section of anti-Assam politicians and bureaucrats are active in their attempts to frustrate the movement by indulging in anti-social activities at Lunding, Pandu, Maligaon and Digboi; these conspirators raised their ugly heads in Bhawanipur, Gauhati Medical College and Dham Dhama and stretched their design to Morigaon, Soalkuchi and Bijni. The same happened in North Kamrup. Army took advantage of the situation, tortured innocent people and raped helpless women and girls. At Duliajan many peaceful picketers were brutally killed by the CRP. It is unparalleled in the history of India. Even Cachar was not excluded. But we are clear about our aims and objectives.

Another Undesirable Factor :

There is another disturbing factor that has complicated the problem. Many infiltrators once deported by Assam Government have been detected again. But most surprisingly now they are armed with citizenship certificates issued by West Bengal and Tripura Governments. Assam Government, however, has no power to cancel these certificates inspite of the previous record that these people are foreign nationals. Only the Central Government can nullify such illegal certificates. Feeling helpless, the Assam Government was reported to have forwarded the cases to the Central Government. However, Central Government has not taken any immediate action against those anti-national officials. Though these factors have complicated the issue, the problem is not beyond permanent solution. Peoples, representatives also must play the constructive role expected of them. In Assam, it is surprising that no member of Legislative Assembly has demanded that the foreign nationals in his/her constituency should be detected and deported. What does it indicate ? It is not very difficult to find the answer.

Our Demands:

1. Foreign nationals must be detected and deported from our country.

- 2a. Names of foreign nationals must be removed from the concerned electoral roll before holding any election in Assam.
- 2b. Inclusion of foreign nationals' names in the electoral rolls in future must be made impossible with the help of an adequate and strong election machinery.
3. Border of India with neighbouring countries must be fully protected to effectively check infiltration.
4. Indian voters residing in Assam should be issued identity cards with photograph affixed.
5. Necessary constitutional safeguards should be provided to the people of North Eastern Region for the next 15/20 years by making necessary constitutional provisions for the protection of the identity of the indigenous people in this Region.
6. The Government of Assam should be free to reject any certificate issued by the district authorities of West Bengal and Tripura.
7. We demand that the authority to grant citizenship certificate delegated to the State Government should be withdrawn by Central Government immediately from all State Governments, so that those foreigners who are detected and deported from Assam do not come back armed with citizenship certificates issued by other States.

Some of Our Proposals :

1. The National Register of Citizens (NRC) of 1951 should be made up-to-date by taking into consideration the additions to the number of each family since the time of compilation of the Register.
2. The comparison of the NRC with the successive electoral rolls since 1952 will also be helpful in making it up-to-date.
3. A free zone devoid of trees and houses should be created all along the border and any one crossing it without valid travel documents from either side must be shot at. We attach great importance to this suggestion. We have reached a stage when threat to the State of Assam and to the country can no longer be ignored.
4. Birth and Death Register at all Block, Village, Town etc. level should be strictly maintained in order to prevent future infiltration into voters' list.

5. The number of check posts should be increased so as to enable one check post to be visible from the other.

Lastly

Madam, the problem demands immediate attention of the Central Government. Firm and strong decision and its implementation to detect and deport foreign nationals from Assam can only ease the minds of the people. We know of your association with Assam from your early days. We all look forward to a speedy and just solution. Loss of so many lives must not go in vain. We hope, you would feel the pangs of our bleeding hearts.

We once again request you to pay a visit to Assam and meet the people and different Organisations.

2nd Feb. 1980

With regards,
Yours Sincerely,
Sd/-Prafulla Mahanta
President, AASU
Sd/-Bhrigu Kr. Phukan
Secretary, AASU

Appendix-C

Assam Accord 15 August 1985 Memorandum of Settlement

Government have along been most anxious to find a satisfactory solution to the problem of foreigners in Assam. The All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) have also expressed their keenness to find such a solution.

2. The AASU through their Memorandum dated 2nd February, 1980 presented to the late Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi, conveyed their profound sense of apprehensions regarding the continuing influx of foreign nationals into Assam and the fear about adverse effects upon the political, social, cultural and economic life of the State.

3. Being fully alive to the genuine apprehensions of the people of Assam, the then Prime Minister initiated the dialogue with the AASU/AAGSP. Subsequently, talks were held at the Prime Minister's and Home Minister's levels during the period 1980-83. Several rounds of informal talks held during 1984. Formal discussions were resumed in March 1985.

4. Keeping all aspects of the problem including constitutional and legal provision, international agreements, national commitments and humanitarian considerations, it has been decided to proceed as follows :

Foreigners' Issue :

5.1 For purpose of detection and deletion of foreigners, 1. 1. 1986 shall be the base date and year.

5.2 All persons who came to Assam prior to 1. 1. 1966, including those amongst them whose names appeared on the electoral rolls used in 1967 elections, shall be regularised.

5.3 Foreigners who came to Assam after 1. 1. 1966 (inclusive) and upto 24th March, 1971 shall be detected in accordance with the provisions of the Foreigners Act 1946 and the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order 1964.

5.4 Names of foreigners so detected will be deleted from the electoral rolls in force. Such persons will be required to register themselves before the Registration Officers of the respective districts in accordance with the

provisions of the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939 and the Registration of Foreigners Rules, 1939.

5.5 For the purpose. Govt. of India will undertake suitable strengthening of the governmental machinery.

5.6 On the expiry of a period of ten years following the date of detection, the names of all such persons which have been deleted from the electoral rolls shall be restored.

5.7 All persons who were expelled earlier, but have since re-entered illegally into Assam, shall be expelled.

5.8 Foreigners who came to Assam on or after March 25, 1971 shall continue to be detected, deleted and expelled in accordance with law. Immediate and practical steps shall be taken to expel such foreigners.

5.9 The Government will give due consideration to certain difficulties expressed by the AASU/AAGSP regarding the implementation of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983.

Safeguards and Economic Development :

6. Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.

7. The Government take this opportunity to renew their commitment for the speedy all round economic development of Assam, so as to improve the standard of living of the people. Special emphasis will be placed on education and science and technology through establishment of national institutions.

Other Issues :

8.1 The Government will arrange for the issue of citizenship certificates in future only by the authorities of the Central Government.

8.2 Specific complaints that may be made by the AASU/AAGSP about irregular issuance of Indian Citizenship Certificates (ICC) will be looked into.

9.1 The international border shall be made secure against future infiltration by erection of physical barriers like walls, barbed wire fencing and other obstacles at appropriate places. Patrolling by security forces on land and riverine routes all along the international border shall be

adequately intensified. In order to further strengthen the security arrangement, to prevent effectively future infiltration, an adequate number of check posts shall be set up.

9.2 Besides the arrangements mentioned above and keeping in view security considerations, a road all along the international border shall be constructed so as to facilitate patrolling by security forces. Land between border and the road would be kept free of human habitation, wherever possible. Riverine patrolling along the international border would be intensified. All effective measures would be adopted to prevent infiltrators crossing or attempting to cross the international border.

10. It will be ensured that relevant laws for prevention of encroachment of government lands and lands in tribal belts and blocks are strictly enforced and unauthorised encroachers evicted as laid down under such laws.

11. It will be ensured that the relevant law restricting acquisition of immovable property by foreigners in Assam is strictly enforced.

12. It will be ensured that Birth and Death Registers are duly maintained.

Restoration of Normalcy

13. The All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) call off the agitation, assure full co-operation and dedicate themselves towards the development of the country.

14. The Central and the State Government have agreed to :-

(a) review with sympathy and withdraw cases of disciplinary action taken against employees in the context of the agitation and to ensure that there is no victimization;

(b) frame a scheme for ex-gratia payment to next of kind of those who were killed in the course of the agitation;

(c) give sympathetic consideration to proposal for relaxation of upper age limit for employment in public services in Assam, having regard to exceptional situation that prevailed in holding of academic and competitive examination, etc. in the context of agitation in Assam;

(d) undertake review of detention cases, if any, as well as cases against persons charged with criminal offences in connection with the agitation, except those charged with commission of heinous offences;

(e) consider withdrawal of the prohibitory orders/notifications in

force, if any.

15. The Ministry of Home Affairs will be nodal Ministry for the implementation of the above.

Sd/-

(P. K. Mahanta)

President

All Assam Students Union.

Sd/-

(R. D. Pradhan)

Home Secretary

Government of India

Sd/-

(B. K. Phukan)

General Secretary

All Assam Students Union.

Sd/-

(Biraj Sharma)

Convenor

All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad.

Sd/-

(Smt. P. P. Trivedi)

Chief Secretary

Government of Assam

In the presence of

Sd/-

(Rajiv Gandhi)

Prime Minister

Date : 15th August 1985.

Place : New Delhi.

Appendix-D

Resolutions of the Convention of the Minority coordination committee*

[Excerpts]

On Memorandum of Settlement of Foreigner Problem in Assam:

This Convention of the Minority Communities of Assam views with grave concern that the Government of India has entered into an Accord with the leaders of the Assam agitation and Government of Assam without taking the representative bodies of the Minorities into confidence.

The Convention considers the Accord detrimental to the interests and safety of the Minorities living in Assam. It has created a fear psychosis in the minds of the minorities.

Though the Constitution and legal provisions, international Agreements, National Commitments and humanitarian considerations have accepted the guiding principles for the settlement and these principles have been shown in the terms of the settlement.

Fixation of 1. 1. 1966 as the base date and year for the detection and deletion of the names of foreigners, violates the terms of the Indira-Mujib Agreement, 1977? and national commitments in respect of displaced persons from erstwhile East Pakistan. Besides, it violates the protective provisions of the immigrant [Expulsion from Assam] Act, 1950, in respect of displaced persons. The Convention asserts that the displaced persons are protected by the National Commitments and laws of the land and, therefore, are not liable to detection and deletion;

The Memorandum of Settlement provides that those who entered in Assam after 1. 1. 1966 (inclusive) and upto March 24, 1971 shall be detected, then their names shall be deleted from the Electoral Rolls and lastly they shall have to register themselves as Foreigners according to the provisions of Foreigners Registration Act and Rules 1939. Right of franchise shall be restored to those persons so detected and registered after ten years from the date of detection.

These provisions of the Accord are decisively anti-minority and contrary to the provision of the Indira-Mujib Agreement, National

* CRPC, All Assam Minorities Students Union, Jamiatul Ulema, Minority Juba Prishad, and Minority Forum for Assam comprised this committee at the Minorities Convention held on 28th and 29th September, 1985 at Haji Musafirkhana, Guwahati.

Commitments, Citizenship Act and Immigrant (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950, and above all the Constitution of India. The Constitution does not provide for double standards in respect of citizenship and therefore any steps for implementation of the Accord will be *ultra vires* of the Constitution. Moreover, this will put the entire minority subjects to persecution;

The provision as laid down in clause 5(7) of the Accord for expulsion of those who were earlier wrongfully expelled and were compelled to re-enter prior to 24. 3. 71 and those minorities who had to leave India and compelled to flee to the then East Pakistan, but came back to India in accordance with the protection provided under the Assam Evacuees Act, also violates the Indira-Mujib Agreement and provision of the Assam Evacuees Act;

Besides, keeping the entrants between 1. 1. 1966 to 24. 3. 1971 as stateless for ten years, and clause 5.2 of the Memorandum of Settlement, violates the Declaration of Human Rights and National Commitments. The manner in which 5.2 of the Agreement is constructed, when implemented, the detection and deletion would not remain to the period of 1. 1. 66 to 24. 3. 71 as stated. To find out who came before 1. 1. 66 as required in the clause, the enquiry can extend even to a period of the partition of the country and as such the entire minority communities of Assam will become liable to scrutiny, consequent harassment and ultimately loss of citizenship of millions;

In respect of the post-1971 entrants, the Accord has made a departure from the accepted principles of the Convention of Law of Nations observed by the civilized states by making provision for expulsion instead of deportation which is a bilateral act enjoined by the Indira-Mujib Agreement 1972. The Convention condemns all attempts, now being made to push the so-called foreigners forcibly across the border by unilateral acts;

This Convention of the Minority Communities of Assam views with dismay and horror that the Memorandum of Settlement signed among the representatives of the Government of India, Government of Assam and leaders of Assam agitation and bears a discriminatory approach against the minorities of Assam and hence it is not acceptable to the minorities of the States;

In view of the above, the convention urges upon the progressive and democratic forces and the minorities of the State to stand united, in this hour of crisis to face with courage and determination, the persecution that may follow the implementation of the Accord.

The Convention also demands of the Government of India to take note of the wounded feelings of the minorities of the State and to scrap the Accord in the greater interest of the States and the Nation

On Preparation of Electoral Roll

This Convention of the Minority Communities of Assam express its grave concern at illegal and arbitrary procedures adopted by the Election Commission of India in preparation of the voters, list in Assam as a result of which a few lakhs of Indian citizens belonging to religious, linguistic and ethnic minorities are likely to be deprived of their right of franchise.

The Election Commissioner has done irreparable damage to the Citizenship right of the minorities by issuing illegal circulars, one after another, which have created great confusion for the minorities and partisan officers taking advantage of contradictory types of circulars, depriving lakhs and lakhs of minorities people from their constitutional rights of franchise. The minorities are going through unthinkable harassment in sustaining their claim and in facing innumerable objection petitions filed by interested parties and individuals on flimsy and misleading grounds. The four documents viz., Entry of Names in 1971 or pre-1971 Rolls, copy of N. R. C. 1951, Citizenship Certificates and Birth Certificates are the only documents, which are being insisted upon are arbitrary, whereas reconstructed copies of the 1971 electoral rolls made available are incomplete, and do not contain more than 3 lakh voters of 1971 rolls on which the 1972 elections were held. Citizenship Certificates have not been issued in most cases to the naturalized Indian citizens and birth registers have not been maintained. Insistence upon the above documents is nothing but a conspiracy to deny right of franchise to the minorities. Other reliable public and private documents like academic certificates, radio licences, land records, ration cards and other facts as admissible under the Indian Evidence Act should be accepted as proof in support of right of franchise for inclusion in the Electoral Rolls. The Election commissioner in its guideline issued for preparation of the Electoral Roll and other circulars issued on racial and partisan lines are in clear violation of provisions of the Peoples Representation Act and Rules thereunder and Regulation of Electors Rules of 1960.

The Convention therefore strongly protests against the procedures followed and urges upon both the Houses of Parliament to hold an enquiry through the petition committees to enquire into the conduct of the election Commission. Unless the Electoral Roll is prepared in accordance with the

relevant Act and Rules, the Convention apprehends that not less than 1.2 million Indian citizens would be deprived of their right of franchise. From the manner in which the Electoral Roll is prepared in Assam currently, it has become evident that the Election Commission has usurped the power the Tribunal as envisaged in the immigrant Expulsion (Determination by Tribunal) Act, 1983. In essence it has assumed the roll of determination of Foreigners in course of preparation of the Electoral Roll. This too is contrary to its own declared policy that the Election machinery is not proper forum to go into the question of citizenship in respect of persons already enrolled or enlisted in any electoral roll. Contrary to the Supreme Court judgement in 1984 in *Indrajit Barua's* case, the Election Commission has arbitrarily chosen the 1971 Electoral Roll as the reference Roll in the preparation of the Electoral Roll of 1985. The Supreme Court upheld the 1977 Electoral Roll on the basis of which the 1979 Electoral Roll was prepared declared free from all infirmities and as such the election of 1983 was upheld as valid.

The Convention further resolves that legal and extra-legal remedies be sought to protect the rights of Indian citizens from arbitrary deletion of names from the Electoral Roll.

Further resolved that the national political parties, representing in Parliament be requested to send a Parliamentary Delegation to Assam to study the situation arisen due to issuance of illegal, arbitrary and racial circulars issued by the Election Commission of India for preparation of voters' list in Assam.

On Eviction

In pursuance of clause 10 of the Assam Accord, the Government, has started serving Eviction Notices on peasants primarily belonging to Minority communities, occupying for a long time as *patta* and *touji* holders, Government, land and lands of Tribal belts and blocks. Taking advantage of the clause and in connivance with the revenue and forest officials, the agitationists and anti-social elements have taken upon themselves, the responsibility of forcibly evicting helpless poor peasantry from land in their possession of looting their properties.

Already a large number of such families belonging to displaced persons, immigrant Muslim and Nepali communities in the districts of Kokrajhar, Darrang, Sonipat and Lakhimpur are evicted and some of them were attempted to be pushed out of Assam to Bangladesh. Unless this inhuman process of eviction and harassment is stopped forthwith, the

future 2.5 million people belonging to above categories is going to be threatened and the whole socio-economic fabric will be destroyed with disastrous consequences.

Further direct pursuance of clause 11 of the Assam Accord in respect of transfer of land by and from persons who are not citizens of India is being interpreted and applied in a manner giving rise to apprehension in the minds of minorities about sale and purchase and also other transactions relating to lands owned and in possession of the minorities.

Problem of Nepalese

This Convention notes with grave concern that the Assam Accord infringes the rights of Nepalese living in Assam conferred in pursuance of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950. In the case of the Nepalese the Government introduced Restricted Area Permits for entering Assam with effect from 30. 7. 1976 and in the case of the Nepalese who entered Assam prior to this date and settled in Assam, the question of cut-off year and defranchisement of Nepalese from 1. 1. 1966 to 24. 3. 71 does not arise.

The Government and Election machinery have started arbitrary action touching the Nepalese depriving them from registering their names as electors settled permanently in India and Assam in particular. Eviction has also started in various rural areas and terrorising of bonafide citizens.

The Convention urges upon the Government, to provide all necessary safeguards, and protection to the Nepalees in Assam and also give justice in view of the Indo-Nepal Treaty 1950 and other relevant orders and laws.

Copy forwarded by
Imran Shah, *Convenor*

(Ahmed Ali Bauskandi)
President

Appendix-E

Resolutions of the Meeting of Different Tribal Organisations of Assam

THIS REPRESENTATIVE meeting is attended by representatives of the following organisation:

- 1. All Assam Tribal Students' Union**
- 2. All Bodo Students' Union**
- 3. All Rabha Students' Union**
- 4. All Assam Deuri Students' Union**
- 5. Ameri Karbi Students' Union**
- 6. All Cachar Tribal Students' Organisation**
- 7. Karbi Anglong Students' Union**
- 8. Bodo Sahitya Sobha**
- 9. All Mising Students' Union**
- 10. Mising Agom Ke'bang**
- 11. Mising Bane' Ke'bang**
- 12. All Assam Tiwa (Lalung) Sonmilon**
- 13. Bebak Rabha Krourang Runchum**
- 14. All Assam Tribal Sangha**
- 15. Tiwa Makhonlai Tokhra (Tiwa Sahitya Sobha)**

The Meeting was presided over by Shri Sabyashachi Rabha, Adviser to the AATSU.

Resolution No. 1: This joint meeting of the aforesaid Tribal organisations holds a threadbare discussion on the language problem arising out of the controversial Circular issued by the Secondary Board of Education, Assam. It observes that the language problem of Assam enters a critical period after the firing incident at Karimganj and as the date of ultimatum submitted by the Bodo Sahitya Sobha, All Bodo Students' Union, All NC Hills Students' Union etc., is approaching closer.

The meeting unanimously resolves to reject the S. E. B. A. circular on the following grounds:

- (i) There was not the least discussion with different linguistic organisation of Assam and academicians prior to the re-issue of the controversial circular kept suspended since Nov.'85 when the Hiteswar Saikia Government had decided to issue such a circular and then suspended its implementation amidst much protest.
- (ii) That the circular does not stand for any well-defined and widely accepted language policy.
- (iii) That the circular is discriminatory to the non-Assamese medium students. Because, according to the circular, the non-Assamese medium students will have to study the Assamese language as the compulsory third language whereas the Assamese medium students will have the privilege to select the language subject at their own choice.
- (iv) That the circular will deprive the non-Assamese medium students from learning the National language-Hindi.
- (v) That the circular is against the national commitment given by the Central Government to the Bodo Sahitya Sobha at the time of their acceptance of Devnagiri script in 1975. The Bodo Sahitya Sobha had accepted the Devnagiri script on condition that Hindi would be taught to the bodo Students as the compulsory third language subject.
- (vi) Above all the circular is undemocratic, unconstitutional and chauvinistic and stands for the undemocratic policy of imposition. It clearly reflects the chauvinist ideology of expansionism of one language.
- (vii) That the circular reflects no academic interest but only deep-rooted chauvinist conspiracy.
- (viii) That the existence of the controversial circular disturbs the creation of a congenial atmosphere for discussion which is most urgent for solution to such a sensitive issue.
- (ix) Therefore the meeting unanimously resolves to demand:
 - (a) Immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the controversial circular of the Secondary Board of Education, Assam.

(b) *Status quo*, i. e., the present existing language policy should be continued until a consensus is arrived at through discussion with different linguistic and ethnic groups.

Resolution No. 2: This meeting of the Tribal organisations discusses the new recruitment policy of the AGP Government, making knowledge of Assamese a pre-qualification to get jobs under the State Government and resolves the following resolution:

It is common knowledge that at the time of passing the Assam Official Language Act, 1960 and during its amendment in 1961 the State Chief Minister, the late B. P. Chaliha, made the categorical commitment that "there is no intention to make the knowledge of Assamese compulsory for recruitment to "State Government services." In the course of his statement issued on July 6, 1961 the Chief Minister reiterated the same commitment and added: "In this connection attention to provision (c) to clause 7 of the Assam Official Language Act is also drawn."

Now in clear disregard of this solemn commitment the Assam Government in the Deptt of Personnel, Secretariat, Administration, and Director of Elementary Education has issued advertisement for selection of candidates for new posts of Lower Division Assistants and L. P. School teachers in the respective Deptts., stipulating that candidates must sit for an examination in General Assamese for 50 marks in addition to General English 100 marks besides precis writing and drafting 200 marks (either in English or in Assamese).

According to the amended Assam Official Language Act, Assamese is the "Official Language" of the State confined to the Brahmaputra Valley while English is the "Official Language" for Cachar region and Bodo is the "Associate Official Language" in some areas of the Brahmaputra Valley.

The machination is for depriving candidates from Cachar, the two Hills Districts and the Plains Tribals like the Bodos of the Brahmaputra Valley. Unless this flagrant and discriminatory violation of solemn commitments and fundamental rights is immediately stopped, the job seekers from the two Hills Districts, Cachar and from among the Plains Tribals would be placed at the disadvantage in an unequal competition thrust by the Government that believes in discrimination.

Hence, the meeting unanimously demands immediate withdrawal of the policy making knowledge of Assamese a pre-qualification to get jobs under the State Government.

Resolution No. 3: The meeting discusses the four language policy advocated by some non-Government agencies as well as by the Government itself. The meeting unanimously resolves to express that such a language policy will unnecessarily increase the burden of the students and will stand as hindrance to the students from learning. In fact, educational institutions would be converted to language institutions by such a four language formula. The burden would be totally unbearable to the tribal students, who by such a language policy will be forced to learn at least two language of non-tribal stock, whereas the non-tribal students will enjoy the privilege to learn language of their own ethnological origin.

Resolution No. 4 : This meeting discusses the New National Policy on Education with particular reference to para (ii) of clause 4.6 which envisages to develop the curricula and to devise instructional materials in tribal language at the initial stage, with arrangements for switching over to the regional language. The meeting objects to the proposal of converting the tribal languages to mere bridges for reaching the regional language, thereby putting great hindrance in the way of developing the Indian tribal languages like Bodo, etc., which are already recognised as media of instruction upto the secondary stage of education. Therefore, the meeting resolves to urge upon the Central Government to review the clause to provide provisions for development of the tribal languages as media of instruction upto the secondary stage of education.

Resolution No. 5 : This meeting unanimously resolves to unitedly demand introduction of all the tribal languages of Assam, viz, Deuri, Rabha, Mising, Karbi, Dimasa, Tiwa (Lalung) etc., as media of instruction as well as subject language. Further, the Government is urged to develop the curricula and to devise instructional materials for the tribal languages.

Resolution No. 6 : This meeting resolves to submit a joint memorandum to the Government of Assam for prompt action in favour of these resolutions. If the Government fails to concede these demands on or before 15th August, '86, the meeting resolves to form a united action committee after 15th Aug., '86 to launch a democratic agitation.

Appendix-F

MINUTES OF Joint Action Committee of Assam Nepali Organizations, held on 9. 9. 1985

Resolution No. 1

The Committee unanimously welcomes the Assam Accord signed between the Government and the Assam Agitation leaders, with a hope that it will bring about a climate of peace and communal harmony in the State which had to pass through many unpleasant odds during the last six years.

However, the Committee has certain reservations on the clauses of foreigners' issue and the cut-off date as agreed in the Accord. It urges upon the Government to reconsider the question of cut-off date applicable for the Nepalis. The cut-off dates of 25. 3. 1971 as set out in the Accord is apparently based on the Indira-Mujib Pact of 1971 and the said cut-off date should not be made applicable in the case of Nepalis. The Central and the State Governments have a number of times in the past been giving assurance by issue of number of circulars and notification, that the effective base date for Nepalis would 30. 7. 1976. However, during the course of discussions on the foreigners' issue, with the Assam agitation leaders, the Central Government seems to have lost sight of the cases of the Nepalis, who would be the target of the foreigners' clauses in the Accord. The Nepalese in Assam have been consistently making the demand for 30th July, 1976 as cut-off date for the Nepalese because on the said date the RAP system for Nepalis visiting Assam was for the first time introduced. Besides, the Assam Govt. circular no PLA/763/74/Pt/53 dated 6. 1. 1979 assured to protect those Nepalis whose name found place in the 1977 electoral rolls. In addition to those, in February, 1984 the Govt. of India is reported to have clarified the position of the Nepalese and those who are in possession of Restricted Area Permit would not come within the definition of "Illegal migrants" and they stood protected. But at the time of reaching the settlement with the agitation leaders, the Governments seems to have been oblivious of all those commitments and assurances given to the Nepalese of several occasions.

This, it is resolved to urge upon the Government to consider the case of the Nepalese in the light of the above and clarify the status of the Nepalese in the light of the above and Nepalese in the State in keeping with the "National Commitments" outlined in clause 4 of the Assam Accord.

Sd/-

(B.L. UPADHAYA)

President of the Meeting.

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Abbreviations : CM, Chief Minister; CJ, Chief Justice; D.C. Deputy Commissioner; DG, Director General; GI, Government of India; Lieut., Lieutenant, MLA, Member Legislative Assembly; MP, Member Parliament; PM, Prime Minister.

