

Instability In North East :

AN INSIGHT INTO INSURGENCY

Dr. M.C. Arunkumar



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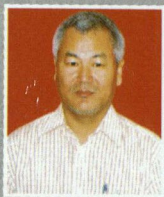
AN INSIGHT INTO INSURGENCY

The insurgencies in the North East are a reflection of its social, cultural, ethnic and politico economic milieu and changes in the environment. The diversity of the North East is reflected in the pattern of conflicts, which are varied in their nature and causes and stance of the insurgent groups, which remain divergent and ever changing, which are being discussed in this book.

This book studies how the North East was exposed to political, administrative and economic system in the rest of the country. And also studies how its consciousness retained its regional experience. However, the book also opines that it is the factor of physical isolation which impinges on the minds of the people the most as it leads to economic and social harassment both the North East and from outside.

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About The Author



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is not only known of his critical observation of the North East Societies but also of his creative works expressing his ideas of the peoples of this region. During his long career of anthropologist in Manipur University, he carried out many projects ranging from tribal studies to social problems relating with political culture and HIV/AIDS. His political plays are staged at state and national festivals by different theater groups. His doctoral work on **Women's Crime in Manipur** opens a new insight to the women's studies in the region. He is teaching Social Anthropology at present. To his credit, there are a number of academic papers as well as popular articles, a number of books.

INSTABILITY IN NORTH EAST:
An Insight Into Insurgency

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CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	(v)
1. Foreign Infiltration Problem In Assam	1
2. Bodo Problems	39
3. Ceasefire Between NSCN And Government Of India: The Development	74
4. Refugees Managing And The Bangladesh Border Issues In Tripura	101
5. Autonomous District Council Election In Manipur: After 20 Years	168
6. Demand For Greater Nagaland: Response From Arunachal Pradesh, Assam And Manipur	175
7. Arunachal Pradesh: Issue Rise By China	197
8. Manipur And The Proposed Visit Of NSCN-IM Leader, Th. Muivah	227
9. Political Uncertainty In Meghalaya	247
<i>Index</i>	265

Chapter 1

FOREIGN INFILTRATION PROBLEM IN ASSAM

Violent political movement as we see today in Assam, is deeply rooted to the question of the socio-cultural matrix of its indigenous people. Until the advent of the British present day Assam was under the continuous rule of Ahom king and isolated. The British annexed this heartland of Northeast India in 1826 and brought it under the provincial administration of Bengal.

They also brought English knowing educated Bengalese for assisting in administration and thereby opened a floodgate for the Bengali-speaking people particularly Muslim peasantry to migrate from the densely populated Bengal to the fertile lands of Bramhaputra valley.

Bengali officials, who held important positions in administration managed to introduce Bengali as the language of the courts and Government schools of Assam in 1837. The British also ignored the demand for replacement of Assamese as language of courts and of educational institutions. However, as a result of protracted protests by Assamese intellectuals, Assamese became language of schools and the courts.

The linguistic clash of the migrant Bengalese and the native population therefore, generated a socio-cultural conflict between the two groups. After partition of Bengal in 1905 Bengali speaking areas of both East and West

Bengal like Cachar, Sylhet (Now in Bangladesh), and Goalpara came under the administrative control of Assam province. With the reconstitution of its colonial geography followed by increased flow of Bengali speaking population, the British created a permanent ground for the cultural conflict in the region.

“Treating Assam as a land frontier of Bengal” was the approach of British officials. This created a general assumption that Assam was an extension of Bengal, which left a deep anti-Bengali imprint in the psyche of ethnic people of Assam. Since then Assamese started regarding the Bengalese as alien like the British. Gradually, a hate-Bengali syndrome became a part of Assamese psyche.

Though, large scale influx of Bengali speaking peasantry in Assam converted its waste lands into cultivable fields and helped in development of its economy, exposure of this otherwise closed society to new socio-political environment adversely affected its socio-cultural scenario and created mistrust between the two major linguistic groups namely Assamese and Bengalese.

“Assamese people consider the Bengalese as a hostile ethnic group guilty of committing cultural genocide in Assam”. Despite their hatred of Bengalis, Assam remained closely linked to the cultural current of India and ethnic Assamese fought shoulder to shoulder with the freedom fighters against the British power.

But in 1946 they differed with Congress High Command on Cabinet mission proposal for regrouping of Assam with Bengal. It was all due to their stiff opposition that Assam could be saved from going into the bag of Pakistan. In fact the central leadership in Congress had virtually accepted the regrouping of Assam with East Bengal, which meant its inclusion in Pakistan. The event however, gave a first emotional blow to ethnic Assamese and created their emotional distance from the centre. After Independence the flow of large-scale Hindu

refugees from East Pakistan to Assam aggressively increased and disturbed its demographic balance.

The Assamese middle class took it as a threat to their marginalisation in their own land. In 1950 with a view to countering linguistic chauvinism of Bengalese, Assam Sahitya Sabha, a literary organisation adopted a resolution and demanded that Assamese should be accorded the status of Assam's official language.

Asom Jatiya Mahasabha (Assam National Assembly - formed in 1936), a socio-cultural organisation submitted a memorandum to Sri Prakash, President of Refugee Rehabilitation Committee, which reflected the Assamese apprehension of Bengali imperialism and creation of Greater Bengal in their State.

The memorandum said: "The problem of Bengal refugees in Assam definitely means a vision of the creation of Brihattar Bang Samrajya (Greater Bengal Empire), based on Bengalism of Bengali language in which combined efforts of a powerful section of Bengali speaking old settlers of Assam, West Bengal, East Pakistan and also of Bengali settlers in other parts of India, who think themselves more in terms of Bengali than Indian can easily be seen from the trend of their mentality and movements.

Behind the Bengali refugee relief movement as carried on by the Bengalis and their persistent effort to rehabilitate them in Assam beyond her capacity, lies this motive aimed at disruption of the strength of the Indian Union for a sovereign Bengal".

Divisive language conflict particularly after reorganisation of States on the principle of linguistic majority followed by demand for giving official language status to Assamese met with strong opposition from the over 16 percent Bengali speaking population of Assam.

This linguistic conflict gradually turned into a major political controversy in the state. This was the beginning

of language agitation in Assam, when All Assam Students Union (AASU) came on the streets. The language riot in 1960-61 caused a number of deaths on both sides.

Even though Lal Bahadur Shastri could resolve the crisis with his three-language formula, the decision of Guwahati University in 1972 to introduce Assamese as language in college education regenerated the language conflict in the state. However the controversy was defused after intervention of D.K. Barua, a powerful Assamese Minister in Indira Gandhi's Cabinet, who suggested restoration of English as medium of instruction in college.

The immediate fallout of the language agitation was the division of Assam, which reduced its geographical boundary after creation of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh as new States. Several tribal groups like Bodo, Rabha, Cachari, Koch, Hajong, Mikir and others with their majority in different pockets of this State also raised their voice against Assamese hegemony and are still demanding separation from Assam.

The Sino-Indian War in 1962 and a sense of helplessness in the expression of the then Prime Minister Nehru's address to the nation created a general impression that Assam was lost to China. It had practically shaken the confidence of the Assamese in the Central Government. This second emotional blow further widened the emotional distance of the people of Assam from centre and sowed the seeds of separatism in their psyche. Besides, economic exploitation, neglect in development projects, corruption, unemployment also added fuel to the fire.

Taking advantage of widening emotional distance of ethnic Assamese from centre, AASU came to the centre stage of Assam politics. It raised the question of large-scale foreigners' migration to Assam and demanded their detection, deletion of their names from voters' list and also their deportation to Bangladesh.

The agitation with full support of Assamese middle class created a political controversy as lakhs of Bengali

speaking Hindu refugees and Muslim infiltrators from erstwhile East Pakistan and subsequently from Bangladesh also became a political force in the state.

The main dispute between the agitating students and the Government was over the cut-off date to determine the arrival of illegal migrants in Assam. The AASU maintained that all the migrants after independence should be declared as foreigners.

It was a most difficult task to distinguish the pre-Independence Bengalese settlers in Assam from those, who came to Assam after Independence. Since the Government failed to tackle the crisis, a violent section in AASU established an armed militant organisation namely United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) on April 7, 1979 "with a purpose of liberating Assam from the illegal occupation of India".

Its leaders like Arbind Rajkhowa; chairman, Paresh Barua; chief of staff, Pradeep Gogoi; vice-chairman and Anup Chetia; general secretary gave a militant manifestation to the movement. The Naga insurgency in the region prompted the ULFA leaders to adopt the path of ethnic insurgency in the state.

PATH OF SEPARATISM

Adopting extra constitutional means to protect the socio-economic ecology of Assam, ULFA leaders raised the issue of Assamese nationalism and gave it a militant and radical turn. They maintained that India's national mainstream had no meaning when the country's leadership failed to meet the aspiration of their people.

They argued that independent political power was the only option for the organised ethnic group of this State that remained in seclusion for centuries. For them ethical solution to socio-economic and socio-political malady could be possible only through revolutionary changes it could be evolved only by independent political power.

On June 8, 1979, AASU gave a twelve-hour call for general strike in support of their demand for "detection, disenfranchisement and deportation" of foreigners.

ULFA leaders actively participated in this Assam Bandh call and its complete success with full support of ethnic Assamese worked as a catalyst for acceleration of its secessionist movement. The Assamese people, who had gradually developed an emotional distance from the centre under Congress Government for overlooking the illegal migration for its short term political game found ULFA as their saviour.

On August 26, 1979 some of the political, cultural and literary organizations including Assam Sahitya Sabha also joined the movement and formed a common platform known as Asom Gana Sangram Parishad (AGSP - Committee for the Assam People's Struggle) with a view to coordinate a statewide campaign on this issue.

The people of Bengali descent particularly the Muslims formed All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU) to counter the agitation, which was basically against them. They demanded that all immigrants, who came to Assam before 1971 be formally granted citizenship. They also held protest demonstrations on the days of further strike calls given by AASU, which led to violent conflict between the two.

ASSAM ACCORD

After six long years of agitation, the Assam Accord was signed between Government of India and the movement leaders in the early hours of August 15, 1985. Both the parties agreed for March 25, 1971, the day Bangladesh came into existence as cut-off date to determine the foreigners!

It was decided to deport the immigrants from Bangladesh who crossed over to Assam after the cut off date. It was also decided that those immigrants who crossed over to Assam after 1966 would be debarred

from franchise for ten years. Jubilation all over Assam following the accord was celebrated as a political victory of AASU. The AASU leaders then formed a political organisation namely Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), which contested Assembly elections in December, 1985.

The AGP with a landslide victory formed its Government led by Prafullo Kumar Mohanty. The Parliament had already passed the Illegal Migrants Determination of Tribunal (IMDT) Act in 1983, which proved Government's acceptance to the presence of foreign nationals in Assam.

But, indifference of the Government to implement the provisions of the accord particularly the identification of undocumented immigrants from Bangladesh gradually caused frustration among the common Assamese. Pressure from the Muslim leaders in Congress, who had formed United Minorities Front (UMF) with a view to countering the implementation of the accord, was the main reason behind the indifference of the Government towards its implementation.

PATH TO TERRORISM

Taking advantage of the AGP in power the ULFA gradually grew up as a violent terrorist group and emerged as a parallel Government in Assam. Its leaders also started conducting trials of people involved in various crimes and also blackmailed them for money. Since leaders of AASU, ULFA and AGP were from the same set of people, who started the language agitation with a common goal to establish the socio-political domination of Assamese people in the State, it became difficult on the part of AGP Government to check the menace of ULFA.

"The cynical characterisation of the same set of people as ASSU in the morning, Government (AGP) at midday and ULFA at night cannot be just laughed away". Failure of the AGP Government in putting pressure significantly on the centre for implementation of Assam Accord disillusioned its supporters and its popularity began to decline. "The

AGP Government not only failed to maintain law and order, but had in fact it encouraged ULFA and the ASSU to take law in their own hands”.

“The reasoning behind the unwillingness on the part of the AGP regime to confront the ULFA lies in its eagerness to keep the terrorists actively alive to retain its anti-centre leverage”.

“The dual membership that existed between the AGP and the ULFA naturally made the administration helpless in tackling the issue. Establishing contact with ISI of Pakistan and other insurgent groups in North East like National Socialist Council of Nagalin (NSCN) and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Myanmar, ULFA emerged as one of dreaded terrorist groups. It indulged in violent crimes including kidnapping of prominent businessmen for extortion and killing civilians and Government officials to create terror in the State.

The largest and wealthiest tea-growing and oil producing areas of Dibrugarh-Tinsukia sector of Assam was their major operational area from where the ULFA drew its financial sustenance. It indulged in kidnapping tea garden officials for huge ransoms, drug trafficking and extortion. The ISI of Pakistan, Karen National Union (KNU), an anti-government guerrilla group in Myanmar, Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), National Socialist Council of Nagaim (NSCN) etc were major arms suppliers to them.

ARMY OPERATION

When AGP Government failed to control the unlawful activities of ULFA, the centre imposed President’s rule in the State in November 1990 and declared ULFA an unlawful organisation under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967. ‘Operation Bajrang’ conducted by Army could control the menace of ULFA to some extent.

The operation was suspended in April 1991 and Assembly elections were held the same year in June. The Congress defeated the AGP and formed its Government

led by Hiteshwar Saikia. The ULFA took the defeat of the AGP as a challenge and resumed its violent activities.

The Army had to launch another operation, known as 'Operation Rhino' in September 1991. Initiative of Chief Minister Hiteshwar Saikia and pressure from army made about 4000 ULFA cadres to surrender to the Government. 'Operation Rhino' was withdrawn and the Government used surrendered members of the ULFA (known as SULFA) for assisting in counter insurgency measures.

The Government took up peace initiative and ULFA sent a five-member delegation to Delhi in January 1992. S.B.Chavan, the then Union Home Minister and the Prime Minister Narsimha Rao held talks with the ULFA leaders but on their return from Delhi the latter went underground and managed to bring back most of the SULFA cadres to their camps.

The AGP returned to power in 1996 Assembly election, which came as a boon for ULFA to accelerate its militancy. However, strong counter insurgency measure taken up under unified command of army and para-military forces not only weakened the ULFA considerably but also forced its leaders to take shelter in neighbouring foreign countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar. The AGP Governments peace initiative for a political resolution failed because of the precondition of ULFA leaders on their core demand of sovereignty.

IDEOLOGICAL DEVIATION

Illegal migrants from Bangladesh were an issue of prime concern for ULFA in the year of its birth. But latter it had no inhibition to shake hands with the same country for its secessionist move.

Contrary to its initial ideological stand, it revised its concept of Assamese identity to accommodate the illegal migrants from Bangladesh that constitute the largest number of foreigners in Assam.

Now it replaced the word illegal migrants from Bangladesh by illegal migrants from India in its writings and calls its movement as Indo-Assam Conflict. The ULFA, which came to its existence to stop migration from Bangladesh gradually, abdicated this ideology and is now helping Islamic militancy as collaborator to Bangladesh and Pakistan.

“A militant movement that came into existence to protect the rights of an indigenous people has done a complete about-face in order to endanger its original parish - and ULFA members are allying themselves with the same people they want to oust from Assam”.

The Statement of AGP leader and Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mohanti in the floor of Assembly on April 6, 2000 indicated that the ULFA turned into a fallen movement “According to the Chief Minister’s report, confessional statements of many ULFA leaders including the organisation’s Vice-Chairman, Pradip Gogoi, have stated that the Pakistani officials in their High Commission in Dhaka arrange passports for the ULFA in various Muslim names. The Chief Of Staff of ULFA, Paresh Barua, for instance travels to Pakistan under the name Kamarudin Zaman Khan, an alias, he has been provided with by the ISI”.

Paresh Barua denied any links with ISI and stated in ULFA’s fortnightly newsletter: “The alleged link of the ULFA with ISI and other foreign agencies is only a heinous conspiracy of New Delhi, aimed at nullifying the legitimate liberation struggle of the people of Assam” (Ibid). The paper of Saikia however, asserted, “The ISI has clearly won the ‘Upper Assam restraint’ round, and analysts are of the opinion that the ULFA is completely in the control of the Pakistani Intelligence Agency’.

In May 2001 Assembly elections Congress defeated the AGP and formed its Government led by Tarun Gogoi. Gogoi also took the peace initiative but a new stand of ULFA Chairman Arabindo Rajkhoa for a referendum in the state over sovereignty issue created deadlock.

Killing of innocent people mostly of Hindi speaking belt in different parts of Assam compelled a large number of business men to leave the state. It also caused heavy economic loss, which also affected the common Assamese. ULFA in stead of restoring the socio-cultural and sovereign political identity of Assam, which was endangered due to large-scale influx of migrants from East Pakistan/Bangladesh submitted to the latter for creating disorder and expansion of Islamic militancy in Assam.

Bangladesh launched a proxy war on behalf of Pakistan against India. Both Bangladesh and Pakistan are now using ULFA leaders as their agents to expand Islamic hegemony in North-East. Commanding operations from the soil of Bangladesh ULFA leaders are involved in creating violent disturbances in the state.

Deviating from its core agenda to fight against unabated migration from Bangladesh they are now captive in the hands of Bangladesh and Pakistan and cannot take their own decision. Today most of the top leaders of ULFA are leading a luxurious life style even with their family members in Bangladesh.

Excerpt from the interrogation report of an arrested ULFA cadre, John Barua .. is reproduced below: " ... Paresh Barua, Chief of Staff of ULFA has a four-room apartment in a three-storied building in Dhaka's Green Road. Paresh Barua stays in this apartment with his wife Bobby Hazarika alias Anwara Begum aged 37-38 years and their two sons Arindam aged 8 and Baby aged 5. Paresh Barua uses a 1000 cc car, which is of Japanese make.

The colour of the vehicle is coffee brown and Shahidul alias Kalita of Mirza, an ULFA cadre drives the car....the children of Paresh Barua address their parents as Ammi and Abbu and speak Bengali and are accustomed to Muslim culture and tradition... Paresh Barua, Pranjit Saikia, Dristi Rajkhowa and Shahidul go and play football in Dhaka's Sansad Bhawan every morning from 5am to 8.30AM". The paper also revealed some violent operations carried out

by ULFA in Assam as revealed by another interrogate. According to news paper report "ULFA runs a school in Bangladesh that reportedly teaches Assamese to people from Bangladesh who are desirous of illegally migrating into Assam".

The report therefore suggests that ISI with its full control on ULFA is determined to execute its conspiratorial design to destabilise Assam and balcanise it on the basis of religion with a view to take revenge of humiliation after bifurcation of Pakistan.

Unfortunately, the successive governments at centre never took up the infiltration issue with Bangladesh seriously due to power politics of the respective political parties, which does not want to displease the Muslim voters of the country.

Initially ULFA drew its recruits mostly from those cadres of AASU, who regarded non-Assamese as alien exploiters and believed in extreme socio-cultural ethos of Assam. But in due course of time it had no inhibition to support other insurgent groups in the region for tactical reasons. The ULFA movement, which was rooted to ethnic chauvinism, also set a pattern for a number of ethnic groups in Assam to demand secession from Assam or from India.

Prominent among such insurgent groups include, Bodo Security Force (BSF), National Democratic Front of B! odoland (NDFB), Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF), Dima Halim Daoga (DHD), Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA), Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), United Tribal Nationalist's Liberation Front (UTNLF), Hhar People's Council (HPC) Rabha National Security Force (RNSF), Tiwa National Revolutionary Force (TNRf), Bengali Tiger Force (BLT), Adivasi Security Force (ASF), People's United Liberation Front (PULF), Gorkha Tiger Force etc.

INFILTRATION FROM BANGLADESH

The ULFA was supposed to protect Assamese identity from the threat of demographic invasion from Bangladesh, which still continues. The joint operation of both Bangladesh and Pakistan for Islamic expansionism in Assam through infiltration has caused an alarming rate of growth in Muslim population of Assam.

According to 1991 Census figures while four districts of Assam had Muslim majority whereas other five districts had Muslim population varying from 32.74 percent to 49.17 percent. "Although the 2001 Religion census is yet to be declared, an independent analysis that was conducted seems to show that there has been a sizeable growth in population among Muslims in Assam. It records that as a community the Muslims had registered an increase of 16.17 percent growth in 2001 figures".

The 1991 Census figures in Assam showed the increase of Muslim population from 24.56 percent in 1971 to 28.53 percent in 1991. If the decadal growth of Muslim population in Assam is taken into consideration it might have increased to over 31 percent by now.

Contrary to the growth rate of Muslim population in this state, its Hindu population decreased from 72.51 percent in 1971 to 67.13 percent in 1991. Decrease rate of about 5 percent in 20 years against 4 percent growth of Muslims might have reduced the Hindu population to about 62 percent by now.

Since the indigenous people of State are mostly Hindus such trend in the growth of Muslim populations if allowed to continue a day is not very far when Assamese identity will turn into Muslim identity. Assam under Islamic subjugation would then become another Kashmir. Report on 'Illegal Migration into Assam as submitted to the President of India by the Governor, Lt. Gen. (Retd.) S. K. Sinha in 1998 "warned that if the present trends are not arrested, the indigenous people of Assam would be reduced to a minority and there may, in course of time, be a demand

for the merger of Muslim dominated bordering districts with Bangladesh". A report "worked out by the Group of Ministers headed by the Union Home Minister in 2001 noted that more than 15 million illegal immigrants have entered India over the last five decades ...".

The Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India in a booklet entitled 'ULFA Alienated' with a sub-titled 'Bleeding Assam (1999)'- condemned ULFA as a "most treasonous unit in the North-East". Highlighting the statements of its top leaders as an attempt to stab its own people on their back, it remarked:

"Jaichand was a patriot compared to ULFA". It also quoted Chandra Prasad Saikia, President, Assam Sahitya Sabha saying, "No Assamese, even in the remotest part of the State will help Pakistan and support ULFA's support to it. The ULFA does not represent Assamese, they represent only themselves". Arbinda Rajkhowa, chairman of ULFA was quoted saying, "India has been occupying Assam illegally like Kashmir, which was never an integral part of India".

PRESENT STATUS OF ULFA

ULFA is reportedly commanding three active armed battalions and is in possession of sophisticated weapons. It is running training camps in neighbouring countries with the help of ISI and other insurgent groups. In the last quarter of 2004 Government of Bhutan took a tough stand against ULFA.

The King of Bhutan personally commanded his army and demolished all the ULFA camps from his territory. Even though ULFA lost its credibility to a great extent due to 'lumpenisation' of its cadres and killing of innocent civilians, it continues its militancy in the state in association of other terrorist groups and is still a force to reckon with.

The separatist violence of ULFA has shed the blood of thousands of people including innocent civilians during last twenty-five years but in stead of reducing the

danger against which it has been fighting, it has only aggravated it. It has now joined hands with the same forces, which are responsible for adding to the plight of Assamese.

Its compromise with Bangladesh and Pakistan in encouraging Islamic militancy and abatement to illegal migration therefore, eroded its popularity to a great extent but ethnic Assamese are still not ready to fully disown it.

Underlying sympathy for ULFA among the ethnic Assamese are still the unresolved key issues and its main strength. ULFA was born like a cub to protect its territory from the poachers of Bangladesh. Ironically, it jumped into the circus ring of Islamic expansionists jointly managed by Pakistan and Bangladesh, which occasionally release and command it only for creating devastating disorder in Assam. It wants secession from India without realising the ground reality that how the various ethnic groups who hardly have anything in common with ethnic Assamese would react if the State is separated from India.

Will it again seek help from ISI or other agencies inimical to India for maintaining its hegemony over them? Or will it prefer to become their colony? In view of the changing historical reality of the country, ULFA's dream for political destiny of Assam being separate from India, which disappeared following the reconstitution of its colonial geography on the eve of partition - may not come true.

Perhaps only the people of Assam could convince the ULFA leaders to join the national political current and save the aggravated crisis of their identity from the threat of Islamisation and socio-economic degeneration of their motherland.

The flip side is that the Government of India should pay greater attention to the North East. Instead of looking at problems from the vote bank politics, there is need to understand the genuine grievances of the Assamese and

redress the past wrongs. Assam may be geographically too far away but they are a great people with a sense of history and belonging to proud cultural milieu. They need understanding and respect.

BANGLADESH ON TERRORISM AND INFILTRATION

Bangladesh has been a major concern for the northeastern states in tackling decades old problem of insurgency and illegal migration from Bangladesh. However, by evicting four top ULFA leaders including its chairman Arbinda Rajkhowa, the new government in Dhaka has sent a firm signal to insurgents operating from Bangladesh.

As former director-general of Assam Police Harekrishna Deka points out, "These steps were not easy to take, and indeed constituted a test of courage and conviction for the new government in Dhaka." He describes proposed extradition treaty between the two countries as a positive development in combating insurgents but felt Bangladesh is yet to demolish hideouts and shelters of N-E insurgent groups.

Security analyst question Dhaka's approach in combating insurgents operating from their territory. On the eviction of four top ULFA leaders, home ministry officials pointed out that these steps are not going to make any difference to the insurgency scenario in Assam and northeast.

It may have a temporary impact on ULFA but active ULFA cadres operating from Bangladesh are yet to be trapped. Dhaka is also non-committal on taking any step to demolish the business network of ULFA and other northeast insurgent groups. It avoided handing over of ULFA cadre Derehegra Sarania a close and active associate of ULFA chief Paresh Baruah.

The authorities in Bangladesh unilaterally decided to defer his eviction. He was also picked up by security agencies with ULFA's foreign secretary Sasha Choudhury

and finance secretary Chitrabon Hazarika but was sent to jail. The authorities in Dhaka were also tipped off about presence of ULFA leaders like Antu Chawdang and Drishti Rajkhowa who are said to have been controlling terror network of ULFA from hideouts in Bangladesh but they were not touched. Dhaka also failed to nab NDFB chief Ranjan Daimary operating from Bangladesh with more than 150 armed cadres holed up in Sherpur district.

Security agencies contrast Bangladesh with Bhutan which took courageous steps and demolished entire network of ULFA, NDFB and KLO in 2003 by launching military operations in one go. India shares a 4,096-km long border with Bangladesh of which West Bengal shares the longest with approximately 2,216-km, most of which is porous, unfenced and vulnerable to infiltration and trans-border crimes.

The border districts like North and South Dinajpur, Cooch Behar, Nadia, Murshidabad, Malda, North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas are most affected by this problem. The ruling CPI(M) turned a blind eye to this problem because large-scale infiltration suited it politically. For a long time the Left remained in denial mode.

It was only in 1997, that the CPI leader and the then Union home minister Indrajit Gupta admitted in Parliament of the presence of over a crore illegal immigrants in the country. If the ruling Left glossed over the issue so did the opposition Congress and later Trinamul Congress. In 2004, the then Union minister of state for home Sriprakash Jaiswal informed the Parliament that nearly 57 lakh illegal immigrants were present in West Bengal.

The BJP state president Rahul Sinha says large scale infiltration has resulted in serious demographic changes in bordering districts particularly Murshidabad, Malda and North Dinajpur. "Following delimitation, it is the bordering districts which have registered the highest increase in the

number of Assembly seats. What does it suggest?" he asked. He claimed that illegal immigrants were first supplied with ration cards and later their names were registered in the electoral rolls thereby according them legitimacy.

"Its conducted with the connivance of border personnel and the MLA," he said. During Khaleda Zia's last tenure, religious extremism and militancy got a chance to thrive in Bangladesh and jihadi outfits like Harkat-ul Jihad Islam (HUJI), Jamiat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), and the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) became powerful. Authorities suspect that some operatives of these militant organisations have been entering West Bengal under the guise of impoverished immigrants who cross the border out of economic compulsions.

POLITICS OF INFILTRATION

It is a political irony of post-partition India that none of its Government ever took the problem of large scale of Muslims infiltration from erstwhile East Pakistan, which is now Bangladesh to bordering Indian states particularly Assam, seriously. Nehru-Liyaqat pact (1950), Indira-Mujib Accord (1971) and much publicised Assam Accord (1985) too failed to stop this 'silent invasion'.

In the absence of any definite policy of the Government, the infiltration gradually assumed an alarming proportion and the aliens became politically so strong that no political party in this state is in a position to form the government without their support.

British annexed Assam in 1826 and placed it under the administrative unit of Bengal Province. They brought educated and English knowing Bengalese to assist them in its administration.

After partition of Bengal in 1905 the geo-political reconstitution of the region increased the flow of Bengali speaking population particularly the Muslim peasantry from the over populated East Bengal to sparsely populated

fertile lands of Brahmaputra and Surma valleys of this isolated northeast corner of India.

The formation of All India Muslim League (AIML) in 1906 at Dhaka also hatched a political conspiracy to expand its numerical strength in Assam and initiated organised migration of Muslims from East Bengal. Nawab Salim Ullah Khan, a prominent Muslim leader and one of the founder members of AIML in his public meeting after the concluding session of the League, "exhorted the Muslims to migrate to Assam and settle there". The alarming forecast of Census Superintendent C. S. Mullan in his Census report of 1931 validated the political conspiracy of AIML in Assam:

"Probably the most important event in the province during the last 25 years - an event, moreover, which seems likely to alter permanently the whole feature of Assam and to destroy the whole structure of Assamese culture and civilisation has been the invasion of a vast horde of land-hungry immigrants mostly Muslims, from the districts of East Bengal. ... wheresoever the carcass, there the vultures will be gathered together".

By late nineteen thirties the AIML turned its expansionist design into a confrontationist Muslim politics in Assam. It encouraged the Muslim migrants to settle in Assam and since then the immigrants have become a chronic problem in the provincial politics of the state.

Influx of Muslim peasantry in Assam converted its wastelands into cultivable fields and helped in development of its economy. But exposure of this otherwise closed society to new socio-political environment adversely affected its socio-cultural scenario.

After 1937 election, Gopi Nath Bordoloi headed a Congress led coalition Government in Assam and tried to stop the unhindered flow of immigrant Muslims. But his Government had to resign in November 1939 to respond to the Congress High Command's call for

resignation of all its Provincial Governments in protest against the War policy of the British. This decision of the party however facilitated the formation of an alternative Coalition Government in Assam headed by Sir Saadullah of AIML.

“During the period between 1939-1941, Saadullah Government allotted one Lakh bighas (Little less than an acre) of land in Assam valley for the settlement of East Bengal immigrants”. He ignored the protest of Assam Congress leaders like Bishnuram Medhi and others on the plea that the Muslim exodus from Bengal to Assam was necessary for the success of ‘Grow more food’ scheme in the state.

Lord Wavel, Viceroy of India in the Viceroy’s Journal, London Publication, December 22, 1943 said: “...The chief political problem is the desire of Muslim Ministers of Assam to increase the immigrations into uncultivated Government lands in Assam under the slogan of ‘Grow more food’ but what really is to ‘Grow more Muslims’.

Mahatma Gandhi too expressed his concern over the problem of such unrestricted immigration but he could not do anything to check the exodus for the reason best known to him.

The resignation of Congress led Government in Assam was the first blunder committed by the party in respect of its policy on Muslim immigration. Even Subash Chandra Bose and the Congress leaders of Assam had argued for exemption of Assam from the decision of the party on the plea that it would help the AIML in settling the Muslim immigrants in the state. The Congress High Command was however, not convinced.

With large-scale settlement of alien immigrants following the installation of Saadullah Government, AIML established a tremendous influence on the Muslim population of Assam, who later aggressively supported the demand for Pakistan. After 1946 general election Bordoloi again headed the Congress Government and took a firm and tough stand for eviction of immigrants.

Alarmed with the eviction plan of Bordoloi, AIML Legislators' Convention held at Delhi in April 1946, demanded inclusion of Assam in Pakistan and strongly opposed the eviction plan of immigrant Muslims. Abdul Hamid Khan, popularly known as Maulana Bhasani, a volatile League leader, who had dominated Muslim politics in Assam till partition was deputed to execute the "AIML plan to turn the non-Muslim majority state of Assam into Muslim majority state". Meanwhile Jinnah came up with the demand of the League for inclusion of Assam in proposed Pakistan.

The central leadership of the Congress party had virtually made up its mind to give up its claim over Assam and Bordoloi had to run from pillar to post and convince Mahatma Gandhi whose intervention could only save Assam from going to Pakistan. Since whole energy of Bordoloi was to save Assam from the geo-political design of AIML, he failed to give proper attention to implement his plan to cleanse Assam from Muslim immigrants.

Assamese people for their centuries old closeness with cultural current of India had fought shoulder to shoulder with the freedom fighters of the country against the British power, but the attitude of the Congress High Command created an emotional distance from the centre.

After partition, the Assamese people expected that there would not be any further trans-migration of Muslims from East Pakistan to their new political territory. Muslim populations in Assam considerably decreased in 1947 partly due to inclusion of Sylhet in Pakistan and also return of sizeable number of earlier immigrants to their original land due to fear of backlash.

But the situation changed, when Mainul Haq Chaudhary, the Private Secretary of Jinnah and also a prominent leader of the youth wing of AIML till partition joined Congress party along with the supporters of Pakistan en-mass.

On the eve of partition, he was shaky whether to opt for Pakistan or stay back in India. He was however told by Jinnah, "wait for ten years, I shall present Assam on a silver plate to you". Jinnah died in 1948 but the Congress Party fulfilled his promise by inducting Chaudhary in the Cabinet of Congress Government led by Gopi Nath Bordoloi. It is often alleged that Chaudhary stayed back in Assam on the advice of Jinnah and other Pakistani leaders to help the immigrants from Pakistan for their settlement in Assam.

After Independence the flow of illegal migration from East Pakistan again increased aggressively as in absence of any population planning by its government or any social movement for creating awareness to control population, its people remained facing the problem of living space for survival.

To carry forward the political legacy of AIML that East Pakistan / Bangladesh needed more lebensraum or living space, its leaders continued their plan for Islamic expansionism in Assam through infiltration of Muslims as the country was unable to shoulder the burden of its multiplying population. The successive governments in Pakistan pursued the twin policy of squeezing out the Hindus and infiltrating the Muslims to settle down in Assam and other bordering states in India.

Against the evil geo-political design of Pakistan, which scared the Assamese middle class of the threat to their marginalisation in their own land, Government of India never had any organised plan or definite policy. Nehru-Liaquat Pact (April 1950) with "special provisions for restoration of rights of immigrants over their properties if they would choose to return not later than the 31st December 1950" rather facilitated the Pakistan Government to accelerate infiltration.

The Pact, which validated the entry of immigrants up to 31.12.50, was against the spirit of Immigrants Act 1950 enacted by Parliament on 13.2.1950. It is said that the

Congress leadership applauded the increase of Muslim immigrants as a God sent opportunity to consolidate the 'Muslim vote banks' and accordingly ruled Assam without any break for thirty years. In early sixties, the Government of Assam under the leadership of Congress Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha launched an aggressive campaign to flush out the immigrants, who settled in Assam since January 1951.

He even disregarded Prime Minister Nehru's plea to go slow on the issue. "Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru wanted the Assam Chief Minister, Bimala Prasad Chaliha to go easy on deportations and even stop them. Chaliha refused, saying that the problem was so critical that Assam's demography and culture would be permanently changed". Chaliha Government armed itself with Prevention of Infiltration from Pakistan (PIP) Act 1964 and pursued the campaign.

Even though, the Muslim leaders encouraged the Bengali speaking Muslim immigrants to declare Assamese as their mother tongue to dodge the police of their detection, Chaliha's campaign against the infiltrators pressed a panic button among them. However, twenty Muslim MLAs in the Government threatened him to topple his ministry if he does not stop deportations.

Chaliha had to succumb to this pressure and the PIP Act was put in cold storage (Ibid.). Those who, were deported earlier gradually returned and again settled in Assam. As per conservative assessment about a million of Muslim infiltrators settled down in the vacant areas contiguous to the areas where Muslim migrants in British India were already settled.

Moinul Huq Choudhury, who later became a Minister in the Union Cabinet of Indira Gandhi Government and former President of India Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad were widely known for being instrumental in the settlement of illegal Muslim immigrants. Gradually, the Muslim population in Assam, which was about 19 Lakhs in 1947,

increased to about 36 Lakhs within 25 years of Independence by 1972.

“Late B.K.Nehru, the Governor of Assam between 1968 and 1973, condemned the infiltration as vote bank politics by the Congress”. “Over the years, the Congress with its activist pro-minority plank was seen as a party which supported the interest of the settlers. It was thus labeled pro-‘Bangladeshi’ by its opponents”.

In 1971 Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign nation after liberation war against Pakistan with the help of Indian Army. In stead of being grateful, the new nation maintained the same policy of Pakistan on Muslim infiltration in Assam.

People of India in general and Assam in particular failed to understand that when the changed geo-political reality of Indian sub-continent in 1947 sealed their political destiny with the respective country of India and Pakistan, how come the infiltration continues?

The argument of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first president of Bangladesh that, “without the inclusion of Assam the East Bengal economy could not be balanced” is ridiculous as a sovereign nation cannot throw its burden on another countries. If he was unable to bear the responsibility of his own people, he should not have gone for liberation of Bangladesh.

Such an attitude of Sheikh Mujib proved that he also carried forward the AIML legacy of Muslim expansionism in Assam. He was an equal partner in implementation of the geo-political design of Pakistan to destabilise Assam and balkanise it on the basis of religion. Z.A Bhutto had spelt out this design as far back as in 1968.

“The late Prime Minister of Pakistan, Z.A. Bhutto, wrote about the geo-political aims of Pakistan in 1968 in his book, *The Myth of Independence* where he elaborated that it would be wrong to think that Kashmir is the only dispute that divides India and Pakistan, though it is

undoubtedly the most significant one, at least is nearly as important as the Kashmir dispute is that of ASSAM and some districts adjacent to East Pakistan”.

Even after liberation, a huge number of Bangladeshi Muslims stayed back in Assam and helped their co-religionists in influencing the electoral politics of this state. They not only further increased the demographic imbalance in the state but also scared the Assamese middle class of the danger to their socio-cultural identity.

One may like to recall that it was a shocking revelation of detection of thousands of Bangladeshi Muslims in the revision of electoral rolls in Mangaldoi Parliamentary constituency in 1979, which sparked the Assam agitation led by All Assam Students Union (AASU) against the Bangladeshi infiltrators.

When the Assam agitation reached to its climax and turned violent, two separate delegations one of legislators (16) led by Janata Party leader Golap Barbor and another of writers(4) led by Dr. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya emphatically narrated the alarming problem of illegal Muslim immigration in Assam in their respective memorandum to the Rajya Sabha Committee of Petitions. Seventy-third Report of the Committee of Petitions, Rajya Sabha dated March 22, 1982 while quoting the memorandum said:

“The official statistics showed that a total of 2,20,690 Pakistani infiltrators were detected in the state during the period 1950-1961 and another 1,92, 339 were spotted in the following decade. During the Bangladesh War of Liberation (1971) a total of 1,00,000 immigrants stayed behind even after Independence of their country. ... The prime factor responsible for this abnormal growth (of Muslims) was the geo-political ambition of Pakistan over Assam”.

The Report quoting the memorandum of Legislators led by Golap Barbor maintained:

"No sovereign nation can permit the influx of foreign nationals into its territory. But the North Eastern region of the country in general and Assam in particular have been experiencing the area being utilised as the dumping ground for a large numbers of foreigners being vomited out by a neighbouring country since a long time.

Besides, a large number of such foreigners were appeased with political rights by entering their names in the voters' list of the state for petty political games at the instance of the vested political forces that were at the helm of affairs since Independence" (Ibid.).

The Report quoting the memorandum signed by the writers of Assam said:

"That the problem of infiltration of foreigners in large scale has reached such a stage that unless immediate drastic steps were taken to solve it, the state of Assam, and for that matter, the entire North Eastern Region, faces the danger of being over run by foreigners in the next few years".

The memorandum also quoted the written address of the Chief Election Commissioner to the Chief Election Officers Conference at Ootacamund on 24th September 1978. He said: "I would like to refer to the alarming situation in some states, specially in the North Eastern Region, wherefrom disturbing reports are coming regarding large scale inclusion of foreign nationals in the electoral rolls".

Referring to Assam the Chief Election Commissioner further said: "The influx has become a very regular feature. I think that it may not be wrong assessment to make that on the basis of increase of 34.98 percent between the two Census (1961-1971), the increase that is likely to be recorded in the 1991 Census would be more than 100 percent over the 1961 Census. ..."Another disturbing factor in this regard in the demand made by the political parties for the inclusion in the electoral rolls of the name of such migrants who are not Indian citizens".

Replying to the debate in Rajya Sabha, the Home Ministry maintained that "the Government is fully seized of the matter. Efforts towards finding a solution satisfactory to all concerned are continuing". During negotiation with the agitating AASU leaders, the Government wanted 1971 as cut-off year for treating the immigrants as foreigners, which meant that all the alien infiltrators, who settled in Assam between 1951 and 1971 were to be accorded Indian citizenship.

However, the negotiation broke down as AASU insisted on January 1951 as cut-off year. One fails to understand that why Government of India did not take a tough stand on the cut -off year for the citizenship on the basis of the National Register of 1951?

Since infiltrators were the foreigners they would not have been given the citizenship of the country. Justice M.C. Chagla, former Education Minister once said:

"We have our constitution, we have citizenship laws. There are decisions by the highest courts to indicate who is a national and who is a foreigner. What does it matter when a person came to Assam if he is not a national but a foreigner. The year of his entry does not change his legal status. Unnecessary complications have been introduced by talking of the cut-off year". Such logic of an eminent personality had no meaning in the vote bank politics of the Congress.

When the movement picked up momentum the Congress Government at centre led by Indira Gandhi pushed legislation in Parliament in 1983 called Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunal (IMDT) Act. Tribunal was set up in each district of Assam to decide upon the presence of illegal migrants. Under IMDT Act onus lied on prosecution to prove before the tribunal that the suspect was foreigner. This was against the provision of the Foreigner Act under which suspect was to prove his or her Indian citizenship.

This lacuna in the new Act hardly brought desired result. Ironically, AASU leaders never raised this point assertively and after repeated negotiations signed Assam Accord in the early hour of August 15, 1985. Violating all the constitutional provisions, the Accord accepted the infiltrators between 1951 to 1971 as genuine citizens of the country. The Accord maintained 1971 as cut-off year for detection, deletion from voters' list and deportation. Assamese people, who were tired of long agitation from 1979 to 1985 celebrated the Accord.

The power hungry AASU leaders, while taking it as their first political victory formed a political organisation namely Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and contested subsequent Assembly election held by the end of 1985.

As expected, they got a landslide victory and formed Government. Soon after forming the Government, they fell into the trap of vested interests and the problem of infiltration went to the back burner. Meanwhile, ULFA an off shoot of AASU/AGP raised armed rebellion against Government of India for cessation of Assam from India.

The people belonging to Bengali descent apprehended a danger to their deportation following the Assam Accord but thanks to Muslim lobby, the process of detection, deletion and deportation remained as slow as it was before the Accord.

One may laugh to know that " between 1983 to 2000, the sixteen tribunals in various districts.... have located about 10,000 illegal's (immigrants) of which a bare 1,400 have been deported". Ironically, even after the alarming report on the 'demographic invasion' by Bangladesh by the Governor of Assam in 1998 the problem of Muslim infiltrators remains as acute in Assam as ever.

Report on 'Illegal Migration into Assam as submitted to the President of India by the Governor, Lt. Gen.(Retd.) S. K. Sinha in 1998 "warned that if the present trends are not arrested, the indigenous people of Assam would be reduced to a minority and there may, in course of time,

be a demand for the merger of Muslim dominated bordering districts with Bangladesh”.

Governor’s report, which called the infiltration a “national threat” and the report “worked out by Group of Ministers, headed by Union Home Minister in 2001 noted that more than 15 million illegal immigrants have entered India over the last five decades from Bangladesh, an intrusion that has completely changed the demography of large parts of Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Tripura and Bihar”.

“The 1991 census shows that the Muslim population of the country increased by 4.02 million, or 65.47 per cent over that of 1971, in Assam the increase has been by 77.42 per cent. Muslims now form a majority in the district of Dhubri (70.42%), Goalpara (50.18%), Barpeta (56.07%) and Hailakandi (55.18%)”.

In addition to these four Muslim majority districts other five districts namely Bongaigaon (32.74%), Morigaon (45.31%), Nagaon (47.19%), Karimganj (49.17%) and Cachar (34.49%) are having Muslim population varying between 32.74 percent to 49.17 percent.

“Although the 2001 Religion census is yet to be declared, an independent analysis that was conducted seems to show that there has been a sizeable growth in population among Muslims in Assam. It records that as a community the Muslims had registered an increase of 16.17 percent growth in 2001 figures.

“According to a study conducted by a few scholars of Toronto University and the American Academy of Arts and Science, 15 Million Bangladesh nationals have infiltrated in India. According to another study done by another American organisation, namely, The Advancement of Science, 20 million Bangladesh nationals are presently staying in India”.

Muslim infiltration from Bangladesh into India is somewhere between 10 millions to 20 millions. Despite these observations on infiltration, Bangladesh never

accepted the illegal migration of its people and often blamed India for deliberately pushing out its principal religious minority to their territory. Infiltration being one of the reasons behind the troubled relation between the two countries but Bangladesh in assistance with Pakistan continues fighting against India for Islamic expansionism as a result Assam has become its first victim.

The political leadership as well as the officials, who govern the country, are fully aware of this hard reality of infiltration but ironically they close their eyes due to the expediency of the vote bank politics.

In absence of any accountably they overlooked the problem of undocumented illegal immigrants settled in Indian soil and threw the Assamese in the cesspool of Muslim vote bank politics. "The Assam Police claimed to have arrested four hardcore ISI functionaries arrested by Assam Police on August 7, 1999. It was disclosed by them that "ISI had plans to train 10000 people in Assam for jihad to liberate Assam and establish an Islamic country comprising the territory of the state and some other parts of North-Eastern India". One may wonder how the Muslim population of Assam from 19, 81857 in 1951 increased to 63,73,204 in 1991.

Census figure suggests over 30 percent growth in Muslim population of Assam after 1951. Taking into account the pace of growth rate between 1951 to 1991 the Muslim population in Assam might have increased to at least 33 percent by 2005. It means the present Muslim population in the State might have increased to another 3 percent.

On the other hand Hindu population in the State decreased from 72.51 percent in 1971 to 67.13 percent in 1991. It means the decrease rate of about 5 percent in 20 years. If the trends are allowed to continue a day will come when indigenous people of State may come under Islamic subjugation and would ultimately be forced to face a serious threat to their identity as happened in the

case of Kashmir. After 22 years of the enactment of IMDT Act the Supreme Court repealed it in July.

The Muslim leaders, who are not happy with the verdict of the highest court in the country already, started their arm twisting approach to ensure that the ruling party at centre could bring another legislation or ordinance for a substitute of IMDT Act. Baduddin Azmal, President Jaiat-Ulema-e-Hind, Assam expressed his anguish against the Congress for its failure to defend the IMDT Act.

He is also exploring the possibility of mobilising the various Muslim organisations to bring them under a political party for contesting Assembly elections. Muslims now constitute over 30 percent of about 26 million population of Assam.

They are now at the centre stage of Assam politics due to their commanding influence in about 40 of the total 126 Assembly constituencies. Sensing the mood of the Muslim leaders all the political parties except the Bhartiya Janata Party have already started hobnobbing with Muslim leaders for electoral alliance with them for Assembly elections in the state.

It is an irony of fate that even AGP and its splinter group AGP (Progressive), whose leaders had led a high voltage agitation against the immigrants are also speaking the same language to appease the Muslim leaders for their support in election as Congress has been doing since Independence. The higher growth of Muslim population in Assam due to unrestricted infiltration for consolidating the Muslim votes is a threat to its socio-cultural subjugation.

It is one of the major sources of bitterness and tension in the region. Now the political clout of Muslim leaders is so strong that no political party is in a position to take a tough stand against the illegal immigrants in this state. But it is ridiculous that United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), an offshoot of ASSU, which fought for detection, deletion (from voters' list) and deportation of these

foreigners - demands cessation of Assam from India with the support of same Bangladesh and Pakistan against whom they had launched agitation.

Due to lack of vision they do not understand the design of the communal politics of the Muslims of Assam and neighbouring Bangladesh. They must know that once, Assam is ceded from India, the Muslim militants will throw away the Hindus in Assam as they did in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Their condition will be same as of the Kashmiri Pundits.

They must take a lesson from the political vision of the former leaders of Assam like Gopi Nath Bordoloi, Bisnu Ram Medhi and B.P. Chaliha who even at the cost of humiliation by the Congress High Command never thought of secession and pursue their political fight against infiltration to the best of their capacity.

THE FOREIGNERS

On Friday, 10 February, 2006, The Ministry of Home Affairs published two notifications amending the Foreigners Tribunal Order of the Foreigners Act 1946, thereby proving once again as was stated by D.N. Bezbaruah, the then editor of the Sentinel that to the Congress party, remaining in power was more important than the security and integrity of the country. Why did the Government issue this order? And what are its implications? The roots of this order lie in the liberation of Bangladesh, in which India had the lead role.

After the liberation, in the historic meeting between Mrs. Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India and Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, the head of the new country of Bangladesh, the latter told the Prime Minister of India that he would take back all the lakhs of refugees who had fled from the erstwhile East Pakistan after 25 March 1971, he would not take back any one who had migrated to India before 25 March 1971; the date of creation of the Government of Bangladesh in exile in India.

This meant the lakhs of Bengali Hindus and Muslims who had illegally migrated from East Pakistan into India from 1950, when India had become a Republic, till 25 March 1971 could not be detected and deported. Mrs. Gandhi agreed, thereby regularising at one stroke lakhs of illegal immigrants from East Pakistan.

The illegal migration from Bangladesh continued like an irresistible tide. The illegal migration had been so persistent that the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, B.N. Mallick had pointed out the dangers of this illegal migration of Bengali Muslims into Assam, West Bengal and Tripura, rendering some of the border districts into majority Bengali Muslim populations by 1961 itself.

The Government of India had then instituted a Pakistan Infiltration Posts scheme in the Border States with East Pakistan. This had been functioning in Assam since the early sixties. The cut-off year for detection of illegal migrants from East Pakistan was 1951 as per the provisions of the Citizenship Act of India.

The National Register of Citizens was prepared on the basis of 1951 being the cut off year. And it was on the basis of this National Register of Citizens that detection and investigation of cases under the Foreigners Act was carried out.

After the liberation of Bangladesh, and the agreement between Mrs. Gandhi and Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, about not taking back the people of East Pakistan who had illegally migrated into India between 1951, after India became a Republic and 25 March 1971, the date the Bangladesh Government in exile was set up in India, there was the question of the cut off year. What was the legal basis for 25 March 1971? The Citizenship Act of India had 1951 after the creation of India into a Republic as the cut off year.

It was at this juncture that the sitting MP from Mangaldoi constituency in Assam died. When the issue of a by election came up, the people of Mangaldoi and

Assam represented to the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) that the electoral rolls of Mangaldoi constituency should be revised as there were a number of foreigners in the constituency.

After inquiries conducted, the CEC announced that the by-election would be held only after the electoral rolls were revised, as there were a number of foreigners in the electorate. At this juncture politicians took over.

The Prime Minister Moraji Desai, had to step down as some of his coalition partners decided to defect. Charan Singh became a lame duck Prime Minister with the Congress driving from behind. The Muslim lobby promptly pressurized the Congress to prevail on the CEC to conduct the polls in Mangaldoi without revising the electoral rolls.

The CEC under pressure from the Congress leadership wilted and announced tamely that he would conduct the elections in Mangaldoi on the basis of the 1976 electoral rolls. In Assam, the result of this humble turnaround was electric.

The different groups who were agitating against foreigners in Assam, the All Assam Students Union (AASU), the, Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP), the Asom Sahitya Sabha combined to form the Gana Sangram Parishad and started the Foreigners Movement. This was a unique movement and resembled the disobedience of the Quit India Movement of 1942.

Meanwhile from the time of the meeting between Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, the issue of the cut off year was hanging fire. The Foreigners agitation started in 1979. During the agitation, the leaders of the AASU were continually pressurized to accept 1971 as the cut off year, but despite all blandishments, they refused to accept 1971 as the cut off year for detection of foreigners.

After four years of agitation, in which lakhs of people courted arrest and shook the whole state, the Central

Government decided to force an election on Assam. This election of February 1983 was a farce. For the people of Assam it was a blood bath. More than four thousand people were killed in firings by the police and paramilitary forces on crowds agitating against the election. For two weeks in Assam from 2 February to 21 February 1983, the state was at war.

In an atavistic frenzy, the Assamese caste Hindus and the Bengali Muslims and Hindus fought pitched battles in the dry paddy fields with spears and bows and arrows.

To a spectator it would appear that he had by mistake landed in the Middle Ages. When it ended on 21 February, the youth of Assam had decided that they would have no option but to take to the gun. The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was born as a result of the blood bath of an election. They contacted the Nationalist Social Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in Dimapur, and soon the first cadres were on their way to the NSCN camp in the Sagaing Division of Burma for training.

The Central Government had one more jolt for the Assamese people. Smarting from the spirit shown by the Assamese people, the Central Government legislated an act called the Illegal Migrant Determination by Tribunal Act (IMDT) in 1983, ostensibly to facilitate the detection of foreigners in Assam.

This was a cruel joke on the Assamese people. The IMDT Act actually made it virtually impossible to detect a foreigner. Firstly, the Centre directed that the Foreigners Act would not apply in Assam. Under the IMDT Act, it was for the Police to prove that the suspect was a foreigner, not for the accused to show that he was an Indian. In all such Acts across the world, it was for the suspect foreigner to prove that he was a national. Meanwhile there was the case of the cut off year.

For 12 years now there was no legal basis for making 1971 as the cut off year. Two years after the election and continual attrition on the leaders of the agitation in

Assam, they finally decided to sign an accord with the Central Government.

The Assam Accord was signed in 1985. Regrettably the leaders of the agitation who had stood off the blandishments of the Centre for years succumbed to the lure of power and agreed to accept 1971 as the cut off year. The moment this was done the Home Ministry must have let out a huge sigh of relief. The Citizenship Act of India was promptly amended and the cut off year was now shown as 1971 and not 1951, courtesy the Assam Accord, 1985!

The Government of India had finally found a way out of the impasse after keeping the issue hanging fire for 14 years! Meanwhile the IMDT act had been challenged in a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court. The court finally decided the case in 2005 after 22 long years that the IMDT act was unconstitutional and illegal and repealed it.

This was a serious blow to the Congress party, grievously affecting its vote bank in Assam and elsewhere. Also, the elections were due in Assam in May 2006. It was not long before the Congress party placed two amendments to the Foreigners Tribunals Order 1964 under the Foreigners Act on the Table of Parliament.

The first order amended the original Order making it applicable to all states in India except Assam. The second amendment issued a new version of the Order applicable only to Assam. Herein it stated that the Central Government or any authority specified shall by order refer the question as to whether a person is or is not a foreigner....to a Tribunal (*italics mine*). In the original Order it was stated that the Central Government may by order refer the question as to whether he is or is not a foreigner to the Tribunal.

By a clever ruse, the Congress party has brought back the provisions of the IMDT act, the provisions that the Supreme Court had ruled as unconstitutional and illegal. Is this not contempt of the Supreme Court's decision

repealing the IMDT act? The Congress party has played this subterfuge on the people of Assam, completely throwing to the winds all considerations of the security of the country. All this for the vote bank for the coming election. It is tragic that in India today we only have politicians who cannot see beyond the tips of their noses.

There are no more statesmen who can see into the next decade, the next century. Does the party realize the forces that they have unleashed by this most puerile of decisions? Today there are several Islamic fundamentalist insurgent groups in Assam all created with the help of the Directorate General Forces Intelligence (DGFI) of Bangladesh and the Pakistan Inter Services Intelligence (ISI).

The main groups are the Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA), the Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) and the Islamic Liberation Army of Assam. These insurgent groups are in the vanguard for lebensraum for Bangladesh.

In August 1999, the Assam Police arrested four insurgents who had come from Pakistan by air to Dacca and crossed over illegally through the Karimganj border with a plan to sabotage installations in India.

On interrogation, they confessed that the Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami (HUJI), Bangladesh had recruited and sent a number of young Bengali Muslim immigrants from Assam to Pakistan for training in ISI sponsored camps of mujahideen. Based on this information, the Assam Police was able to arrest a number of immigrant Bengali Muslims who had been trained in Pakistan.

They also arrested one Muhammad Muslimideen, the Chief Organiser of the HUJI Bangladesh in India. They found that the Naib Amir of the HUJI in Assam Muhammad Fakhruddin from Goalpara in Assam was now based in Pakistan.

What is most interesting about these Islamic Fundamentalist insurgent groups is that they have not done any operations till now. Interrogation and intelligence

reports have revealed that they are in a phase of preparation now. They are to motivate, recruit cadres, train them in Pakistan, stockpile arms and explosives and motivate the people for the coming insurgency. The target date is reported to be in 2015.

It is certain that severe communal rioting will break out in Assam, West Bengal and Tripura along the faultlines between the immigrant Muslims and the local people. The infamous election of 1983 was a forerunner for this prognosis.

The sequel to this communal rioting will be the eruption of a Bengali Muslim insurrection spearheaded by the Bengali Muslim insurgent groups now seed bedded in Assam. And this will be an insurgency to get a homeland for the immigrant Bengali Muslims in Assam. The act of reviving the provisions of the IMDT Act that sends a clear message that infiltration into Assam is facilitated is the first sign to the enemy that India is a soft state.
