Socio-Political Condition of Assam Today

And

Role of Media in this Regard

--- A Study

--Sangita Sharma
This paper is an attempt to study the socio-political condition of Assam today and role of media in this regard. The study is being carried out under the aegis of Prem Bhatia Memorial Trust, New Delhi.
The People and the Society:

Assam has a composite culture of numerous tribes, races each portraying peculiar ethnic identity. As a first step to the study of socio political condition of this great northeastern state of India encompassing an area of 78,438 sq Kms, it is imperative to begin with the basic element of a society, that is, the inhabitants.

It will be injustice and unethical to point out a single tribe or race amongst all, as Assamese. Because Assam not only belongs to that community which speaks the official language Assamese. Assam equally belongs to those communities who might not even understand Assamese. These people even today speak their peculiar dialects or duans as locally called. These tribes like the bodo, karbi, chutia, miri, koch, kachari, garo, khamtmi, singphos, deori, mess, dimasa, laloong, etc, each practicing their peculiar traditions, customs, religious beliefs and language, inhabiting the hilly areas, are the original inhabitants of Assam. In the 12th and 13th centuries Ahoms and Muslims came to Assam. The Ahoms are originally conquerors from Thailand who had come to Assam form the east and mesmerized by the virgin beauty of this land, settled down here embracing its language and way of life. In face, the name, Assam, is believed to have been given by the Ahoms who ruled Assam for seven hundred years.

All these facts serve as an introduction to the diverse yet composite culture of Assam. This is a society that has emerged out of intermingling of diverse races and tribes, yet living peacefully cultivating a feeling of brotherhood and oneness. Assamese, a peace loving community, historically speaking, has always embraced everybody who has come to this land forgetting all religious and communal differences. It is heartening to note that Assam, though infested with violent outfits today, can proudly acclaim its communal unity and peaceful coexistence. One can witness religions unity of rare variety in Hajo, a small town, 35 kms kilometers from Gauhati, “Serving as the meeting place of pilgrims of three major religions- Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist, Hajo has been most eloquently delivering the message of sarvadharma samabhava in its true spirit… the Buddhists from Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet, who believe that Hajo is the place where Lord Buddha attained his parinirvana, come to worship Mahamuni”. -- ‘Folk Culture of Kamrup’, by Paresh Baishya.

There is the Haigrib Madhab Mandir of the Hindus and along with it is Puwa Macca of the Muslims. Devotees throng in large numbers all round the year to these places of worship, irrespective of religious boundaries. It is believed that a visit to Puwa Macca is equivalent to a visit to Mecca, and for the fulfillment of wishes one has to offer prayers at both Haigrib Madhab Mandir and Puwa Macca. “The Muslims came to Assam in the year 1206. …in the social sphere there was no difference or social divide
between Hindus and Muslims…..the Ahom rulers were so liberal that as an honour to their bravery, did not mind in marrying off their daughters to the Muslims” – ‘Drishti Aaru Shrishti” by Abdus Sattar. This reveals the kind of secularism Assam has always believed in. “Fatiha of the Quran was translated into Assamese as Id Stuti by Maniram Dewan, the great patriot, thus displaying social unity of such high order”, says Abdus Satter. Hence, Assam practiced secularism long before the Constitution of India was drafted.

Speaking of folk culture mention has to be made of Bihu, the festival of Assam. Bohag Bihu the festival to welcome the spring and thereby the Assamese new year. Bihu is celebrated all over the state by the different communities in their own ways. Teenage children dance to the tune of the pepa, the traditional flute, wearing the different ethnic dresses, singing the same love songs but in their peculiar dialects.

Besides Bihu, the festival portraying social solidarity, other predominant features of the Assamese society include practice of Shakti puja, presence of naamghars (the prayer halls one finds in every locality), and Vaishnavism (the religion taught by the Saint Shankardeva, the great religious and social reformer of the region.). Christianity though a new entrant (brought in by American Christian Missionaries and popularized among the hill tribes, in the early19th century) is prevalent in the Assamese society.

This is an introductory chapter to know the Assamese society closely for a convenient understanding of the present socio – political condition of the state.

**Population growth:**

As per 1991 population census, the population of Assam, stood at 22.41 million. That is, average density of population per square km is 286 in 1991. According to the Registrar General of India the projected population of Assam stands at 26.37 million as on October 2000.

The state which occupy the thirteenth position in terms of population in India has two distinct natural regions, viz. the Brahmaputra and Barak Valley. While the former constitutes of 18 districts of plain areas and 2 districts of hill areas, the latter is composed of 3 districts with plain areas. For administration and revenue purposes, the 23 districts of the state are divided into 48 sub-division and 149 revenue circles.

Decadal growth of population of Assam is 24.2 per cent during 1981-91 (taking into account the interpolated population in 1981) as against 23.9 per cent for the country as a whole.

It may be noted here that while between 1901 and 1991 population of the country
increased by about 3 times, while the same in the case of Assam rose by about 7 times during the said period. As per projected population of Assam and India also the density have been found to be 336 and 310 per sq km respectively as on October 2000.

According to the Election Commission, there has been an increase of more than 30 percent in 17 assembly constituencies and more than 20 per cent increase in 40 constituencies between 1994 and 1997. Significantly, the all India average growth for a three year period intervening the two intensive revisions in 1994 and 1997, is 7 percent, the growth in Assam for this period is 16.4 per cent. This increase is mainly due to large scale illegal infiltration from neighbouring Bangladesh.

**Annual Average growth rate of population (1971-91);**

**Districts with high growth rate:**

Dhemaji – 3.72

North Cacher Hills – 3.48

Kokrajhar – 2.89

Bongaigaon – 2.52

Kamrup – 2.56

Dhubri – 2.27

Sontipur – 2.29
Lakhimpur – 2.26

Golaghat – 2.32

Karbi Anglong – 2.83

**Districts with low growth rate:**

Jorhat – 1.44

Karimganj – 1.77

Sibsagar – 1.65

Dibrugarh – 1.62

A study of community- wise percentage growth of population in Assam gives a naked picture of rate of illegal infiltration into the stage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Assam</th>
<th>All India</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 1951-1961</td>
<td>33.71</td>
<td>38.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 1971-1991</td>
<td>41.89</td>
<td>77.42</td>
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</tbody>
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(There was no census in Assam in 1981. The figures indicated have been worked out on the basis of 1971-91 growth rate) the statistics above clearly show that rate of growth of Muslim population in the state has been much higher than the all India level. Muslim population has grown by 77.42% in 1991 from what it was in 1971. While growth of Hindu population has been nearly 41.89% in this period. Muslim majority districts as per 1991 census are Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta and Hailakandi. Now the list includes the districts of Nowgaon, Karimganj and Morigaon.

(courtesy: Governor of Assam’s report on Illegal Migration into Assam to the President of India, 1998).

Birth and Death rate:

According to the Sample Registration Bulletin published by the Registrar General of India -

From 1991 to 1999 both birth and death rates were found to be higher in the state than that of the country as a whole.

During the year 1999, the birth rate of Assam was 27.0 per mile while the all India rate was 26.1 per mile. Similarly, death rate of Assam stood at 9.7 per mile while the all India rate was 8.7 per mile. {India rate excludes data for Jammu and Kashmir and Nagaland (rural)}.


The Problem of Illegal Immigration:

Political history of Assam since the early 1970’s is mostly dominated by the issue of illegal immigration from neighbouring Bangladesh. The unabated influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh has rendered severe demographic changes to the region, thereby threatening to reduce the indigenous Assamese population to a minority.

Movement of population across the border has been a regular practice for over a century now. During the days of British Raj, that is in the late 1860s, migration to this part was encouraged for economic reasons. British initiated tea plantation in upper
But seeing local people’s reluctance to leave their agricultural fields and work in tea gardens, the British hired labour from east Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and parts of Orissa and Bihar. Thus came in large number of consumers depending upon the limited agricultural produce. Assamese agriculturists not being very ambitious about increasing productions, stayed contended with cultivating one crop a year. In order to meet the food requirement of additional population of tea garden workers, the British had to hire more such labourer to be employed in agricultural fields. Gradually immigration of labourers from east Pakistan increased. Unlike Assamese people, the migrants were much more industrious, hard working and ready to be employed in any hazardous work. They gradually encroached vast vacant lands suitable for agriculture. Thus opening up the path of illegal immigration to the north east India.

This immigration took a dangerous turn after independence of the country in 1947, thereby inducing a political perspective to the entire issue. “With constitutional reforms, the country started advancing towards democracy, which is a game of numbers. The Muslim League now came up with its demand for partition, on the basis of religion. This added a new twist to this population movement. During Sir Mohammed Sadulla’s Muslim League Ministry, a concerted effort was made to encourage the migration of Bengali Muslims into Assam for political reasons. The Victory Lord Wavell wrote in the Victory’s journal, ‘the chief political problem is the desire of Muslim ministers to increase this immigration into the uncultivated government lands under the slogan of Grow More Food but what they are really after, is Grow More Muslim……. When the demand for partition was raised, it was visualized that Pakistan would comprise Muslim majority provinces in the West and Bang-e-Islam comprising Bengal and Assam, in the East….. Jinnah confidently declared at Gauhati that Assam was in his pocket. The Cabinet Mission Plan placed Assam in Group C with Bengal. Both the congress high command and the Muslim League accepted the grouping plan but Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi vehemently opposed it. He was supported by Mahatma Gandhi. The grouping plan was foiled and Assam was saved from becoming part of Pakistan.” Report on Illegal Migration into Assam submitted to the President of India (KR Narayanan) by the Governor of Assam, (Lt Gen (RTD) SK Sinha) on November 8, 1998.

After partition of India, it was basically movement of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan. Along with it large number of Muslims crossed the border due to economic reasons. However, Hindu refugee is still continuing in Tripura and West Bengal, immigration is mainly that of Muslims in Assam. “Hindu population in East Pakistan started declining steeply. In 1947 it was 27% by 1971 it got reduced to 14% and by 1991 it was down to 10%”, Assam Governor’s report of 1998.

There has been a great fall in the percentage of indigenous population from 87 percent of indigenous people in 1901 to 61 percent in 1951 and a further low of 50 percent in 1971.
Recent Report on Immigrants:

The Group of Ministers (GoM) in its report on reforming the national security on May 23, 2001, pointed out, ‘The law and order problems of the north-east region have staggered from bad to worse with the influx of an estimated 12 million Bangladeshi since 1971. Politically the Bangladeshi migrants are in a position to influence results of the elections in about 32 percent of the constituencies in Assam’.

From 1891 till independence, the state’s population grew at around 20 percent each decade. It went up to 35 percent between 1951 and 1971, and has now touched 53 percent.

Political encouragement to this influx of immigrants cannot be ruled out even today. The ever increasing pool of immigrant population is serving as a substantial vote bank to the political parties. Though demand for restriction of entry of foreigners to the state is made by political parties time and again, yet clandestine patronage and support is visible.

This unabated influx of illegal migrants from neighbouring Bangladesh raised mass discontent to such a level that people from all walks of life moved into agitation in late 1970s under the leadership of All Assam Students Union (AASU), thus bringing into a new era in Assam politics.
Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act-(IMDT)

The IMDT Act was enacted to deal with the issue of illegal immigration into the state. Provisions of this Act to detect, delete and deport illegal migrants from Assam proved inadequate and earned great mass dissatisfaction. It is believed that this Act is standing as a stumbling block in the implementation of the Assam Accord of 1985 (copy of Assam Accord is attached)

Certain features of the IMDT has given rise to controversy as it stands contrary to the established laws of the country. But before scrutinizing IMDT it is imperative to first know certain features of the established laws of the land with regard to foreigners.

- It was agreed upon by the government of India under the Assam Accord that foreigner who came to Assam on or after March 25, 1971 shall continue to be detected, their names be deleted from the electoral rolls and be expelled in accordance with law. It was decided that steps would be taken for the deportation of such foreigners. The Assam Accord also says that Indian citizenship would be granted to all East Pakistani Muslims who came across illegally between 15 August 1947 and 24 March 1971, with a Special Provision that those who came between 1 January 1966 and 24 March-1971 would be eligible for this, only after a lapse of ten years of being identified as foreigner.

- In pursuance to this provision of the Assam Accord, Act No. 65 of 1985 was enacted by the Parliament incorporating a new provision, namely, Section 6-A into the Citizenship Act, 1955. This section said ‘Special Provisions’ as to Citizenship of persons covered by the Assam Accord. Under sub-section 1 (b), the term “detected to be a foreigner” has been defined as follows- ‘detected to be a foreigner’ means detected to be a foreigner in accordance with the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 (31 of 1946) and the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order 1964 by a tribunal Constituted under the said ‘Order’.
That means determination or detection of a foreigner has been left to be governed by the provisions of an existing central legislation, that is, the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Foreigners (Tribunal) Order 1964.

- Section 9 of the Act provides that as regards the question as to whether a person is or not a foreigner the onus of proving that such person is not a foreigner lies upon such person notwithstanding anything contained in the Indian Evidence Act, 1872.

- The Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964 made under the Foreigners Act, provides for a summary and expeditious proceeding for determination of a foreigner and his deportation. The burden of proof always lies with the person concerned to show that he is not a foreigner.

**Salient features of IMDT Act:**

- The IMDT Act has sought to classify ‘foreigners’ into ‘illegal migrant’ and ‘foreigner’. While section 3 (b) of the Act states that ‘foreigner’ has the same meaning as in the Foreigners Act, section 3 (c) of the Act defines ‘illegal migrant’ as a person who satisfies the following conditions-

1. he has entered into India on or after the 25th day of March, 1971
2. he is a foreigner
3. he has entered into India without being in possession of a valid passport or other travel document or any other lawful authority in that behalf.

On the basis of this a special procedure of detection has been prescribed for illegal migrant who, in fact, is a foreigner and whose detection is always governed by already existing provisions of Foreigners Act. Providence of a Special Procedure more so in the nature of the one under IMDT Act is therefore judicially redundant and stands contrary to the existing laws of the land governing detection of foreigners.
• According to section 8(2) of IMDT; no application shall be entertained by the Tribunal unless the person in relation to whom application is made is found or resides within the jurisdiction of the same police station wherein the applicant has his place of residence.

• Sub-section (3) of section 8 maintains that such application has to be accompanied by affidavits sworn by not less than two persons residing within the jurisdiction of the same police station corroborating the averments made in the application.

• Sub-section (3) also requires that any application filed against any foreign national shall have to be accompanied by such fee being not less than Rs 10 and not more than Rs 100 as may be prescribed.

• Sub-section (2) of section 8-A casts obligation on the applicant requiring that every application made by him under sub-section (1) has to be accompanied by a declaration by yet another person residing within the jurisdiction of the same revenue sub-division.

• Sub-section (2) also says that no person can make more than 10 such applications or more than 10 such declarations.

• Under the provisions of the Foreigners’ Act and Order framed there under, the Superintendent of Police in every district was earlier delegated the authority vide various notifications issued under the Act on behalf of the Central Government as per the Foreigners’ Act in case of pre-March 25, 1971 migrants, the SP in the state could issue Quit India notices without any prior notice to the foreigners tribunals and the onus to prove that one was not a foreigner always lies on the foreigner. Under IMDT Act, the SP has been barred from serving such notices upon the illegal entrants before he is determined to be an illegal migrant by the Tribunal or the Appellate Tribunal.
(courtesy: Assam Accord Implementation- IMDT Act – A stumbling Block by Arup Chandra Borbora, Chairman, Gauhati Bar Acieration).

The IMDT is being looked into as highly discriminatory legislation as it is applicable only to Assam and not to any other State. Contrary to any other law where the foreigner has to prove his citizenship, the IMDT entrusts the burden of proof on the complainant that the person against whom the complaint is lodged is a foreigner.

“This Act caters for an Appellant Tribunal of two retired High Court Judges, sixteen district Tribunals of two retired district/Additional District Judges with supporting staff.. The border organization of 4000 policemen processes the case of alleged illegal migrants. The efforts of these agencies maintained at a cost of hundreds of crores to the exchequer, extending over a period of 15 years, has led to the identification of only 9,599 illegal migrants. Out of these only 1,454 could be deported. These statistics amply establish the futility of continuing with the IMDT Act in its present form”, Assam Governor’s report to the President of India, 1998.

Proponents of IMDT say that the Act ensures adequate protection of rights of the minorities so that genuine Indian citizens are not harassed in the bid to detect and deport illegal migrants. But opponents view it as a flawed document encouraging and protecting illegal immigrants. But experience and statistics prove beyond doubt that the IMDT is not adequate to deal with the epidemic growth of infiltrators to this part of the country and in fact the act is serving the interests of certain vested interest groups and political parties whose main stay has been the vast vote bank provided by lakhs of illegal migrants.

Rate of growth of population in Bangladesh is very high. It is the world’s most densely populated country with a population density of 969 per sq km. The population of Bangladesh is growing at the rate of 2.8 million per year. Economically the country is very backward and not being able to provide livelihood to its ever increasing population. The per capita income in Bangladesh is 170 dollars per year. Moreover the hazard of natural calamities like flood and drought are a regular feature. So moving out for greener pasture is obvious. Coupled with the fact that Indo-Bangladesh has a
very porous border. And this is a boon to the very weak Bangladesh economy. From 1993 to September 1998, the BSF tried to hand over 39,746 illegal migrants to Bangladesh Rifles. But Bangladesh accepted only 9,253 migrants and refused to accept 30,493.

Under such circumstances if our laws are also not adequate, the consequence could be disastrous.

**Political Developments: Major Political Developments from 1979 up to the present day**

**Media reports from 1990 up to the present day:**

Politics – a necessary evil of society. Politics or struggle for power itself influences the society and social problems equally has its impact on political developments. To understand the political scenario of Assam it is essential to look back into the chronological development of events.

**The Assam Agitation: (1979-1985)**

The All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) along with the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) launched a mass movement in 1979, for the detection of illegal migrants, their deletion from the voters’ list and their deportation to Bangladesh.

Unabated influx of illegal migrants had always stood as a matter of great social concern. The desire to throw the migrants out of the state was burning in the minds of people. But the spark which lit the fire of agitation was the by – election of 1978 to be held at Mangaldoi. Electorate complained about the presence of 70,000 illegal migrants in the voters’ list and government’s apathy towards it. “The people got convinced that illegal migration on a colossal scale had been taking place and this sparked the anti-foreigner’s movement in Assam. Government of India forced the 1983 election in Assam on the basis of a defective voter’s list. This was done on the plea that there was not enough time to revise the electoral rolls before the election. There was widespread violence during this agitation including the infamous massacre.
of 1700 Bengali Muslims at Nellie by the Lalung tribe”, *Assam Governor’s report to the President of India, 1998*.

This Assam Agitation which started in 1979 continued to 1985 and gained large scale mass support. The ruling government then was Congress under the Chief Ministership of late Hiteshwar Saikia. Anti-government or rather anti-Congress feelings were mounting. This was the time when anybody who spoke Bengali was treated as a foreigner.

This agitation was led by a group of students’ leaders headed by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta.

Finally, at the initiative of the AASU and AAGSP, the historic Assam Accord was signed when Rajiv Gandhi came to power in New Delhi in 1985. According to the terms of the Accord, all foreigners who entered Assam on or after March 25, 1971, were to be detected and deported. Along with it the Accord agreed upon fencing of the border with Bangladesh to prevent further immigration.

Signing of this Accord, gradually normalized the situation. A new regional party, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) was created which brought together many of the prominent leaders of the agitation. Prafulla Mahanta who was chosen leader of the new party, came to power after winning the elections with an absolute majority.

*The Assam Accord of 1985: (copy attached)*
ASSAM ACCORD
15 August, 1985
Accord between AASU, AAGSP and Central Govt, on
the Foreign National issue

MEMORANDUM OF SETTLEMENT

Government have all along been most anxious to find a satisfactory
solution to the problem of foreigners in Assam. The All Assam Student 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 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 were held during 1984. Formal
discussions were resumed in March, 1985.

4. Keeping all aspects of the problem including constitutional and legal
provisions, international agreements, national commitments and humanitarian
considerations, it has been decided to proceed as below :-

Foreigners Issue

5.1 For purposes of detection and deletion of foreigners, 1.1.1966 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 up to
24th March 1971 shall be detected in accordance with the provisions of the

5.4 Names of foreigners so detected will be deleted form 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 this purpose, the Government of India will undertake suitable strengthening of the governmental machinery.

5.6 On the expiry of a period of ten year 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 practical steps shall be taken to expel such a foreigner.

5.9 The government will give one consideration to certain difficulties expressed by the AASU/AAGSP regarding the implementation of the illegal immigrants (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 to 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 & technology through establishment of national institutions.

Other Issues

8.1 The Government will arrange for the issue of citizenship certificates in the future only by the authorities of the Central Government.

8.2 Specific complaints that may be made by the AASU/AAGSP about regular issuance of Indian Citizenship Certificates (ICC) will be looked into.

8.3 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 a line routes all along the international border shall be adequately intensified. Order to further strengthen the security arrangements, to prevent effectively any infiltration, an adequate member of check posts shall be set up.

9.2 Besides the arrangement 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 to the road would be kept free of human habitation, wherever possible. Patrol along the international border would be intensified. All effective measures would be adopted to prevent infiltrators crossing or tempting 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.
immoveable property by foreigners in Assam is strictly enforced.

12. It will be ensured that Birth and Death Registers are duly maintained.

Restoration of Normalisation

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 kin 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 examinations, 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 the nodal Ministry for the implementation of the above.

Sd/-
(P. K. Mahanta)
President
All Assam Students' Union

Sd/-
(B. K. Phukan)
General Secretary
All Assam Students' Union

Sd/-
(Biraj Sharma)
Convener
All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad

Sd/-
(R. D. Pradhan)
Home Secretary
Govt. of India

Sd/-
(Smt. P. P. Trivedi)
Chief Secretary
Govt. of India
In the Presence of
Sd/-
(RAJIV GANDHI)
PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

Date: 15th August, 1985.
Place: New Delhi.

1. Election Commission will be requested to ensure preparation of fair electoral rolls.

2. Time for submission of claim and objections will be extended by 30 days, subject to this being consistent with the Election Rules.

3. The Election Commission will be requested to send Central Observers.

Sd/- Illegible
HOME SECRETARY

1. Oil refinery will be established in Assam.

2. Central Government will render full assistance to the State Government in their efforts to re-open:
   (i) Ashok Paper Mill
   (ii) Jute Mills

3. I.I.T. will be set up in Assam.

Sd/- Illegible
HOME SECRETARY
**AGP rule from 1985-1990:**

The AGP came to power in 1985 winning an absolute majority. The party gained wide scale support from all sections of the society. People were moved by these young leaders and their patriotism. Masses attached great hopes to this party.

“The Northeast, particularly Assam, was then a unique story, perhaps the only one in independent history when the national media’s sympathy – even admiration- was with the trouble-makers. Most of us on the beat, barring the Calcutta media, never even called them troublemakers. In print, we called them the Assam movement leaders. In conversation, they were just “boys” ….. the first time such a thing happened in our independent history. If you spoke Bengali, you were an infiltrator” and, therefore, in trouble. But what Mahanta, Phukan and others also proved subsequently was that ethnic hatred was negotiable as long as they had political power. They forgot the foreigners’ issue, deported even fewer infiltrators than the Congress governments had done in the past and failed to bring in even the most basic concessions to their impoverished state from the Centre….. Mahanta has run the most ineffectual, unimaginative and worthless government in Assam in a long, long time and chances are that his own voters are now going to make him pay for it. The very Asamese caste Hindu who treated him and the other student leaders like gods is now set to boot out each one of them ….. Assam, as a consequence, has not only lost a decade, it’s even slipping backwards. The only good this has done is driving more and more talented Assamese outside the region”. – Shekhar Gupta, *A ‘people’s movement’ that became a cruel joke.*

From 1985 to 1990, the electorate was shocked by the horrendous development of events under the Mahanta administration. Corruption was rampant at all levels of socio-political life. Muscle power became the ultimate buzzword. No improvement has visible in the inflow of illegal immigrants. Industrialization took a backseat. Massive employment under political consideration accounted for excessive burden on the public exchequer, thereby leading to heavy outflow of government funds on unproductive labour under the heads of salary and wages. There was complete anarchy
and centralization of power paving very few openings of transparency in government.
The insurgents, United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFAs) were given an open hand
to operate in the state. Killing and extortion was the order of the day. Particularly the
major tea companies, were the target of the insurgents. Tea industry failed to get
adequate support and security from the government. Tea company officials were
kidnapped, looted and killed. The Doom Dooma tea company was demanded huge
sums of money by ULFA and were threatened to death if it failed to comply with its
orders. The company officials were shifted out of Assam immediately. Meeting
similar fate another tea company, Brook Bond also closed its auction center.

Complain of tea companies and other such incidents of gross law and order violation
in the society and the state government’s apathy served a death blow to the Mahanta
regime.

On the 27th of November 1990, President’s rule was imposed on the state. Together
with it came in the massive military operations of the central government to wash
away the insurgents. Operation Bajrang was deployed in Assam.

Print media’s role was very critical at this juncture. On the one hand AGP government
was criticized openly, their activities, various scandals were brought to the forefront,
but along with it, a section of the media covertly if not overtly penned ideas
clandestinely supporting the insurgents.

The Rs 200 crores Letters of Credit (LoC), scandal was brought to the limelight which
reported involvement of ministers belonging to both AGP and Congress. Reports
claim it to be the biggest case of corruption in the history of Assam.

As a provision, the government provides credit to the government contractors carry on
work. This is done through a letter of credit whereby the amount of payment is being
sanctioned by the department that is deputing the work. Only then the money can be
withdrawn from the treasury by the contractor. Now the contractors at the patronage of
the ministers, produce fake letter of credit with highly inflated sum of amounts.
Obviously, the minister concerned stood as a party to the amount received.
Paper clippings:

“The Assamese people would realize their mistakes then when not even a single AGP minister would be able to go to the legislative assembly ”- Homen Borgohain, *Sutradhar, June 1990.*

“This AGP ministry is sorrow to the entire Assamese community”- Homen Borgohain, *Sutradhar, Oct 1990.*

The party gained criticism from every angle of the society. Former Chief Minister, Sharat Chandra Sinhga wrote, “the Chief Minister Prafulla Mahanta himself has acknowledged the deteriorating law and order situation of the state. He blamed the Home Minister who on his part had blamed the Chief Minister. In such a situation we very well know the condition of the masses”.

There arose differences among the members of the AGP. Prafulla Mahanta himself saying, “Bhrigu Kumar Phukan is the most corrupted minister in my ministry”- *Dainik Agradoot, 3rd April, 1991.*

Meanwhile President’s rule was imposed on Assam. AGP Home Minister Bhrigu Kumar Phukan made public statements, “Mahanta’s worthlessness, weakness and treacherousness created such grave law and order problems that President’s rule had to be imposed”- *Natun Dainik, 26th March 1991.*

Atul Borah, the once PWD minister of the AGP, walked out of the party, formed a new party and openly criticized the Mahanta government. Prafulla Mahanta became more and more unpopular among his party colleagues and the general public. Insurgent activities increased greatly. Police and security officials were threatened. It was basically a rule of anti-socials.

“People casted their valuable votes and brought the AGP party to power so as to implement the Assam Accord and detect and deport foreigners (illegal migrants) from Assam. But even after fighting for four year could not gather information of lakhs and lakhs of foreigners. Hence, during AGP’s tenure it was proved that presence of lakhs
of foreigners in Assam is not true. That means the AASU-Ganasangram Parishad’s 6 years of agitation was based on false data”. – Hemen Das, Sutradhar, May 1990.

Great differences appeared inside the party colleagues. Brindaban Goswami and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan left the AGP in 1992 and formed the Natun Asom Gana Praishad (NAGP). However, the party later merged with the AGP.

Though media was vocal about the prevailing situation, one Assamese daily, Budhbar, was the most vocal of all. (Role of Budhabar discussed in a later chapter).

Congress rule from 1991-1996:

In 1991, Hiteshwar Saikia led Congress government came to power. Saikia government tried to initiate the process of dialogue with the ULFAs. But that could not be achieved, mainly due to active opposition from Hirokjyoti Mahanta, one ULFA leader. On 31st December 1991, Mahanta was killed in an encounter with the army in Gauhati. After that another significant leader of the insurgent outfit, Anup Chetia was arrested. This gradually began the process of talks with the militants. Saikia Government offered rehabilitation facility for the surrendered militants. Soft loans were offered. Some of them were absorbed in the lower cadres of the state police. Some helped the government. Kalpajyoti Neog, Sailen Dutta Konwar and Sunil Nath were the among the first batch of surrendered militants. The peace initiatives were on, but sudden demise of Hiteshwar Saikia due to illness on 22nd April 1996, haulted the entire peace process. Bhumidhar Barman took the reigns of power on the 22nd of April and continued upto the 14th of May 1996.

But here again another problem arose that of constant war between the ULFAs and SULFAs (surrendered).

According to IANS report, 27th July 2001, the surrendered militants has urged the local government to provide then with weapons to counter the guerillas targeting them.
“We are now regular targets of our former comrades and, considering the vulnerability, it is imperative on the part of the Government to allow us possess licensed weapons for self-defence,” Sunil Nath, former publicity chief of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), told IANS. “The Police has been asked to provide necessary protection to the former militants and carry out a threat perception study”, then Minister of State for Home Affairs of the present Congress government, Pradyut Bordoloi told IANS, “We can give arms license to the surrendered militants if they meet the norms and other pre-requisites like any other abiding citizen. There is nothing with this,” the minister added.

**AGP rule from 1996-2001:**

Again in the next general elections, the AGP came to power. Prafulla Mahanta sat on the seat of power on the 15th of May, 1996. Destruction of the Assamese community new no bounds this time. Though the peace process was on, the AGP government led the state to a social and economic deplorable condition. This time the government arrested a couple of Tata Tea (P) Ltq. Company executives, on allegations of keeping close ties with the ULFAs and thereby funding their activities. Other tea companies like the Williamson Magor and Gooddricke Group were accused of providing funds to the banned NDFB militants. This was the time, when simultaneously with the ULFAs, the Bodo militants also came to the limelight.

The AGP government created havoc in the Assamese society. The alleged involvement of the party in a series of secret killings shaked the very base of democracy. Media played a significant role at this time.

**Falling image of AGP:**

AGP ministers including Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, was caught in the trap of scandals relating to women. “…, it (AGP) has suffered successive blows, with three of its former Ministers, including former Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, figuring in scandals involving women”, *Kalyan Chowdhary, Frontline.*
Mahanta was alleged of practicing bigamy. One government employee Sanghamitra Bharali alleged Mahanta of marrying her secretly in a temple in Mumbai. Ms Bharali, is also a married women.

Though Mahanta denied of any such relation with the said and termed it as a conspiracy of the Congress to stain his party’s image, yet this served a death sentence to the party. The story gained wide scale media criticism. Certain Assumes language dailies, carried the storing in spice filled tones for several weeks. This accelerated the falling image of the party in the eyes of the masses.

The party unanimously elected a new president, Brindaban Goswami.

Adding fuel to fire was the two other cases involving Mahanta’s party colleagues Rajendra Mushahary, former Minister for Welfare of Plain Tribes and Backward Classes, has been charged with rape, and his former colleague Jatin Mali has been accused by a domestic help of making her pregnant. The AGP suspended Mushahary. Charges against Mushahary were proved. Such an incidence of crime charged against a minister of tribe welfare, and the subsequent proof of the case, was a bonus to the already losing support of the minorities with which the party came to power in 1996. The All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) and the All Bodo Women’s Welfare Federation (ABWWF) took up her case. Mahanta had to resign as the party president on the 4th of September 2001. The party held him responsible for its decision to have an electoral alliance with the BJP and blamed for the party’s debacle. “The AGP’s former allies, the Left parties, broke off after the AGP allied itself with the BJP” – Kalyan Choudhari, *The AGP and Some Scandals – Frontline*.

**Elections 2001:**

General elections of May 10, 2001 did not come as a surprise to any close observer of Assam politics. Defeating four-party alliance led by AGP, Congress led by Tarun Gogoi came to power winning 71 out of 125 seats.

The AGP alongwith its allies, the BJP, ABSU (All Bodo Students’ Union) and
Autonomous State Demand Committee (United) Could secure only 39 seats.

“Despite large-scale violence by ULFA and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), more than 70 percent of the electorate exercised its franchise in largely peaceful polling. The alliance was not acceptable to a section of BJP leaders and workers. Some of them left the party to form the Asom Bharatiya Janata Party (ABJP) under the Presidentship of Hiranya Bhattacharya, one of the founder-members of the BJP in the State. The AGP was also faced with a similar revolt. Some of its leaders crossed over to the Congress (I).”


The AGP won 20 seats, BJP 8, the ABSU 9 and the ASDC (U) two.

Election results prove beyond doubt the image of the party in the electorate. Prafulla Mahanta’s image stooped such low that he even lost from his own Dispur constituency though emerged victorious in his Berhampore constituency, winning by a margin of about 5,000 votes. The 2001 election was such a blow to the AGP that it was nearly washed away in its former strongholds, Kamrup and Nalbari.

“The minorities, who account for 28 percent of the State’s population and who had largely voted for the AGP in 1996, shifted en bloc to the Congress (I) camp. Even case Hindu voters, who had always backed the AGP, switched their allegiance to the Congress (I). The principal reason for this is perhaps the AGP government’s failure to improve the law and order situation. The government had no answer to the series of killings in the State....... For the first time in the State’s history, the Assembly has no members from the Left Parties. The CPI and the CPI(M) had three and two seats respectively in the previous House.”—Frontline.

The gaining momentum of the congress can be gauged by its Lok Sabha election results since 1996. In 1996, it won 5 seats, in 1998 it won 9 and in 1999 it won 10 seats. While the AGP could not even win one of the total 14 seats in the Lok Sabha in 1998 and 1999.
Print media has played a tremendous role in the political scenario of Assam. It did act as a vibrant force in revealing the discrepancies of the AGP government and finally its overthrow. May it be the issue of the ‘secret killings’ or ‘LoC scam’ or the much criticized ‘Mahanta’s second marriage’. Particularly vernacular media in Assam has always been very critical about the government in power.

Now at this juncture when the political turmoil has subsided together with insurgent activities at a low ebb, the crisis being financial, media’s role is again very significant. Because all these days, that is since 1985, industrialization or development of the state was kept in the backseat emphasizing more on establishing political peace and stability and of course tacking insurgent activities.

The per capita GDP at constant prices (1993-94) is Rs. 6,733 for Assam as against the all India average of Rs. 11,632 (1999-2000) (courtesy: CAG report for the year ended 31st March 2001).

Tiding over the financial crisis and development of the state is the need of the hour.

**Congress rule from 2001 –**

Tarun Gogoi led Congress government had promised to hold Panchayat polls at the earliest. Accordingly Panchayat elections were held in December 2001 after a gap of 5 years. The elections were scheduled to be held in 1997 but dilly – dallying of the Mahanta government has led to this stopgap. Consequent being loss of nearly 1 crore rupees a year for five years by each block. Because funds for rural development projects come directly from the centre to the Panchayats.

**Panchayat Elections 2001:**

“Of 345 Zila Parishad seats, the Congress bagged 282 while the AGP and the BJP finished with mere 12 and 18 seats respectively. Of the Anchalik Panchayat seats, the Congress got 1127, while the AGP and the BJP tally read a poor 86 and 93 respectively. Independents and others got 353 seats. Out of 1730 posts of Gaon Panchayat Presidents, Congress won 1220 of them while the AGP and the BJP
finished with a tally of 92 and 95 respectively. And of the 11,573 Gaon Panchayat
members elected, the Congress had the lion’s share of 6443, the AGP tally was 1256
while the BJP managed 1061”, PTI.

An estimated 60 percent voters on December 27 cast their ballots in the first phase of
Panchayat elections. The first phase of the Panchayat elections was held amidst tight security for 237 Zilla Parishads and 1240 Gram Panchayats. Polling was deferred in 80 ZP and 334 GP constituencies of Kokrajhar subdivision in Bodoland Autonomous Council where the polls were being held partially’ – PTI.

Congress’ emerging stronghold in the state is evident from its consecutive victories. First to the assembly seats, then autonomous district councils of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills in December, 2001 and finally the Panchayats thus wiping out AGP from every possible corner.

Holding of Panchayat election had been a great achievement for the Gogoi ministry.

**Power to Panchayats and the Case of DRDA Funds:**

State BJP accused the ruling Congress government of misutilisation of 428 crores of rupees released by the central government for implementation of the DRDA schemes in the state. In this context the state unit of the BJP has lodged a complaint to the Union Rural Development Minister Vankiah Naidu for the ruling Congress government’s ‘siphoning off’ of rural development funds.

Opposition alleged that there is gross violation of rules and guidelines and misuse of rural development funds by the state government. The Tarun Gogoi government had issued a set of guidelines for implementation of all rural development schemes by the DRDAs in which it was stated that all work under the rural development department would be executed by the local construction committees formed for the purpose.

The opposition claimed that ‘the construction committees’ formed by Congress government to utilize DRDA funds were in violation of central guidelines and a device
chalked out to siphon off the rural development funds to the coffers of Congressmen in the state. BJP MLA Mr. Bimolangsu Roy said, ‘these construction committees are formed only with members of the Congress and even the defeated Congress candidates of the recently held Panchayat elections’. Ironically, the central guidelines clearly state that ‘no elected representatives of the Panchayat should be involved in the construction committees’. The formation of these construction committees are also a violation of the rules and guidelines of the Union Rural Development Ministry. The centre has imposed a total ban on contractors in the rural development schemes.

Another important point raised by opposition is that even after more than seven months of the Panchayat elections in the state, the government has not administered oath of office to all the elected representatives.

Nationalist Congress Party (Assam) gave deadline to the government of Assam to implement Article 243 (G) of the Indian Constitution within 31st July, 2002, in the state or else threatened to launch agitation throughout the state and also consider approaching the judiciary for proper action. The party General Secretary, Keshab Thakuria alleged the ruling Congress government of massive misappropriation of rural funds given by the centre.

The NCP informed that though the much awaited election to Panchayats were held at the end of December, 2001, the power to Panchayats were not given as yet. The 73rd constitution amendment provided for constituting separate election commission, finance commission for the Panchayats. The government of India has also formulated guidelines to carry out the activities of rural development. But the Assam government defying central government guidelines, constituted certain construction committees with non-elected members to any tier of Panchayat.

While Tarun Gagoi informed that this delay in administering office at the Panchayats is due to certain internal problems that will be cleared at the earliest.

However, the Chief Minister rests quite satisfied with the “Raijar Padulit Raijar Sarkar” (People’s Government at People’s Doorstep), program launched for
empowerment of people and proudly announces that his government has been able to release Rs. 937.32 crores in nine months for rural development in the state. The Right to Information Bill has also been passed by the state assembly this year (2002).

In its initial days that is around November 2001, Tarun Gogoi government faced the crisis of Pulse Vitamin – A which caused the deaths of several children all over the state. On the 11th of November 2001, a UNICEF sponsored Pulse Vitamin – A campaign was carried in the state. It is alleged that the vitamin drops caused the death of several children in the state. Though Gogoi ministry gained wide scale media criticism in this case, the Chief Minister said that the vitamin drops were not the cause of deaths. It is just a coincidence. The state government on 11th December had submitted a detailed report to the Assam Human Rights Commission. According to latest developments, on 5th June, 2002, in accordance to an order of Gauhati High Court, IGP (CID) is entrusted to enquire into the case.

**Talks with ULFA:**

The ULFA has always been giving three conditions for talks. Firstly, that talks should be held outside in a third country, secondly, presence of an United Nations member country but only as a witness and not as a participant and lastly, talks would be only on the issue of sovereignty of Assam. When Tarun Gogoi assumed the throne on May 18th 2001, he assured of talking all possible steps to begin the peace process through dialogue. But the militant outfit informs that first the government should withdraw army from the state, and declare ceasefire. Along with it if the government creates the ‘conducive environment’ the outfit is ready for talks. Meanwhile music maestro and Chairman of Sangeet Natak Akademi Dr Bhupen Hazarika had offered to be the mediator between the government and the militants. Till then it is silence from the militants’ side complaining that the government is not taking adequate steps for talks. But such a laid back attitude from the militant’s side should not be taken in a positive way. It might be suspected that the outfit which is believed to have been losing its stronghold in the state, is just regrouping itself before taking up a strong dangerous
step. It might also be true that the outfit, seeing no prospects at hand, might just change its three conditions of talks.

While Tarun Gogoi upholds the view that talks with the outfit is a central government decision, “we might just be a potential force to accelerate the process”. Union Defence Minister George Fernandes who visited the Nagaon district of Assam June 2002, said that the ULFAs have not taken any initiative to come out for talks.

The question of Ethnic identity:

Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC):

Bodo, a plains tribe inhabiting the northern plains of the Brahmaputra valley, are one of the original tribes of Assam. The Bodos have a population of more than 30 lakhs.

The Bodos belong to the mongoloid race. Upto the 12th century, that is before the Ahoms came and establish their rule in Assam, the Bodos were the ruling class of the region.

The Bodos today have a number of organizations like the All Assam Bodo Students; Union (AABSU), People’s Democratic Front (PDF) representing the rights and demands of the Bodos.

For better representation of the community, the Bodos, started their agitation for a Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC), enveloping the areas north of the Brahmaputra and west of river Pachanoi. This movement which began in 1985, finally ended with the signing of the Bodo Accord in 1993 with the union government and ABSU at the initiative of late Congress (I) leader and former Union Minister of State for Home Rajesh Pilot. However, the accord failed to satisfy both the Bodos and non-Bodos as it left several intricate issues unanswered. The accord proposed the inclusion of five districts of lower Assam with majority non-Bodo population in the BAC.

BAC region, covered nearly 2,300 sq km in the Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Darrang, Mangaldai and Sonitpur districts on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra. A secton of the Bodo leadership wanted 515 more villages to be
included in the BAC. The then Congress (I) State Government, led by Hiteshwar Saikia, said that the villages could not be included in the BAC as Bodos constituted less than 2 per cent of their population.

BAC was given legislative and administrative power over 38 departments. Election in this BAC is done on the basis of universal adult franchise and 75 percent of the seats are reserved for schedule tribes. Bodo is the official language of the region. A Bodoland Executive Council (BEC) has been formed catering to the various needs of the community upholding their ethnic identity.

The Bodo Accord failed to cleanse ethnic violence in the Bodo dominated regions of lower Assam. In fact, ethnic violence was further triggered by the Bodo militant groups National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) and Bodo Security Forces (BdSF), demanding a separate state of Bodoland outside the territorial limits of state of Assam. With the slogan “Liberated Bodoland is for Bodos only”, the militants started inhuman atrocities on the non-Bodos residing under BAC since 1994. The Bodos in their spree to prove Bodo majority in the proposed Bodoland have been inducing to ‘ethnic cleansing’ of non-Bodos that include Muslim Bangladeshi migrants and Adhivasi groups including Santhals, Oraons, Mundas and Rajbongshis. “As the militant groups know that the Bodo people in the so-called Bodoland or in areas under the BAC do not constitute more than 30 per cent of the total population of about 30 lakhs, the Bodo militants need to evacuate non-Bodos in order to dominate the region”, Frontline, May 11-24, 2002.

However, after several rounds of talks with the Centre and the State government the BLT signed ceasefire agreement in March 2000 and agreed to give up demand for a separate state and decided for a territorial council. In this decision the BLT was supported by ABSU, BSS, BPAC and a host of other mass organizations. Hence, began their movement for a Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) under the sixth schedule of the Constitution of India, covering 2570 villages spread over 5186 square kilometers. But this decision of the BLT earned severe criticism and rivalry from the
violent NDFB. Though NDFB has been marginalized to a great extent yet its violent activities are continuing unrestricted.

Now the proposal for creation of BTC has been delayed in the face of the question of protection of rights of minorities under BTC and the boundary of BTC.

In an all-party meeting convened by Tarun Gogoi on March 20, 2002 decided that the boundaries of the BAC should form the “basis” to demarcate the boundaries of the BTC. In the second all-party meet convened by the Tarun Gogoi ministry in Gauhati in July 2002, it was agreed to include additional 126 villages in the proposed BTC as per the demand of the Bodo Liberation Tiger (BLT) along with its allies. The decision arrived at sans the status of another 141 villages demanded to be included in the BTC. It is to be noted here that these 126 villages includes 107 villages which were among the 353 villages excluded from the Bodoland Autonomous Council in 1999 by the then ruling AGP government. However, repeated peace-talks between the BLT and the Union and State governments since March 2000, resulted in reinclusion of 248 villages while giving up the claim on 105 villages.

Meanwhile, Sanmilita Janagoshthiya Sangram Samity (SJSS), a group of 19 non-Bodo organizations are protesting against the creation of BTC on the issue of violation of rights of non-Bodos under BTC.

This delay in the formation of BTC has invoked tremendous reactions from the BLT and its allies. The BLT has threatened to revive its militant movement for a separate state if the government further delays the creation of the proposed territorial council. Meanwhile violent activities in the Bodo dominated areas are continuing unabated, particularly atrocities on non-Bodos. NDFB on its front is continuing its movement for a separate Bodoland.

**Rights of minorities under BTC**

Question of protection of rights of minorities under Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) has been a stumbling block on the path of creation of BTC. It is claimed that of the 2570 villages as many as 1490 have less than 50 percent Bodo population. The
minorities include Adhivasies like Santhals who have significant percentage of population in BTC areas. Under Sonitpur district the places like Urogiloga and Amloga have more Santhals than Bodos.

The Santhals have been major target of Bodo terrorist attacks since the year 1996. The Bodos maintain that Santhals are one of the several tribes who have migrated to Assam during the British Raj to work in tea gardens. The vision paper of BLT for Bodoland pointed out that ethnic strife took place in Kokrajhar mainly because of the illegal occupation of the forest land by the Santhals. Since 1996, this community has been the regular target of the Bodo militants. That year 200 Santhals were killed by Bodo militants. On the 14th of July 2002, the Bodo militants massacred 9 Santhals in the Bhuraka-Maligaon relief camp.

Ironically, these are the people who have been living in relief camps provided by the state administration since 1996 riots. These people are not being rehabilitated yet. Now their lives are also not spared even at relief camps by the militants. Though the Bodos consider these Santhals as migrants encroaching vast forest lands, organization like the Assam Santhals Sahitya Sabha, claim that they are the aboriginals of the region and not migrants from Jharkhand. The Santhali dictionary by Rev. PO Bodding says, “the Santal language, or santali, as it is usually called by Anglo-Indians, is spoken by about 3 million people living in a strip of country to the south of the Ganges, comprising districts belonging to Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in the North East India, and now also in northern Bengal districts up to Assam. The Santhals are by far the most numerous of the aboriginal people and tribes known generally as Kols, Kolarians or Mundas”.

Such exploitation and brutal killing of Adhivasies by Bodo militants, has given birth to a militant faction known as the Cobra Militants. This outfit was formed after the 1996 massacre of Adhivasis. The Cobra militants are enjoying tremendous mass support as the Adhivasis see them as the only protective shield against the militant attacks.

Massacres and extortion by Bodo militants forced thousands of non-Bodos to leave their villages and take shelter in camps set up by the government.
Currently about two and half lakh non-Bodos are sheltered in about 20 camps in Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Bongaigaon and Dhubri.

Meanwhile several Adhivasi communities living in BAC are demanding ST status under the constitution to safeguard their rights. These Adhivasi communities constitute for 65 percent of the population in BAC.

But this Bodo tangle took a new turn in the event of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee minority cell demanding White Paper from both the union and state governments on the question of protection of rights of non-Bodos in the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) minority cell in its memorandum to AICC president Sonia Gandhi, expressing concern over protection of rights of non-Bodos in the proposed BTC had urged upon the party president to initiate steps for a white paper on the issue. Chairman of APCC Minority Department, AS Gulam Osmani, said “if the Bodoland territorial council is formed under the sixth schedule of the constitution, then the rights of the non-bodos residing in those areas will be curtailed by manifold, particularly in terms of ownership of property and also there may arise restrictions in the question of franchise”. Mr. Osmani informed provisions can be made under the sixth schedule of the constitution where non-bodos in the BTC might not be allowed to offer their candidature in the elections. He cited the examples of Nagaland and Meghalaya in this regard. The memorandum stated “earlier both the state and the centre and assured that all people irrespective of caste, community and creed would be allowed to live and get equal status in the Bodoland area. For not finalizing the boundary of Bodoland, the extremists often resort to harassment to the non-bodos. As such the state and centre are required to be insisted upon to issue a white paper in this matter and perhaps the party also needs to take a clear stand so that the people are assured of a definite future in the Bodoland area”. The Minority Committee demanded that if necessary, the non-Bodos may be given their due rights even if it requires amendment of the existing laws.

On the 3rd of July this year (2002) it was decided at the Union level that an expert committee comprising officials of both Union and Assam government would now
draft the proposal for safeguard of the non-Bodos under the BTC and pave way for amendment of the Sixth Schedule of the constitution. The recommendations are yet to come.

**Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council: (KAAC)**

The Karbi Anglong Hills District along with the North Cachar Hills, was given the status of autonomous district council under the sixth schedule of the Constitution of India in 1951.

Public discontent was visible as the autonomous district council failed to satisfy the needs of the community. Provisions under the constitution was not enough. Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), the Left Democratic Alliance of CPI-ML, began the movement for an Autonomous State for Karbi and Dimasa Tribes under Article 244 (A) of the Constitution in the hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills in 1986. In 1995 an MoU was signed between the Union Government and ASDC whereby the district council was upgraded it to Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council along with that of North Cachar Hills.

According to the terms of the MoU, 30 departments of administration was to be transferred to the autonomous council. “This MoU was practically redundant”, ASDC chief Holiram Terang informed. This MoU lacked practical implementation. Hence, began the movement for an autonomous state again.

However, in 2000 August ASDC was split into ASDC – United led by Holiram Terang and ASDC-Progressive led by Chandra Kanta Terang (de facto head DR Jayanta Rangpi). “The common Karbi people’s dream for a separate autonomous state within the state of Assam lies shattered as the ASDC stalwarts are engaged in a power struggle within the party”, Bijay Sankar Bora, *The Assam Tribune, July 22nd, 2000*.

However, the Election Commission recognized the ASDC (U) owing to its performance in the assembly polls of 2001.
On 31st May 2002 Government of India invited a delegation comprising members of ASDC, Karbi Students Association (KSU) and Karbi Nimso Chingthur Asong (KNCA) for discussions. “We could convince the government that the present provisions under sixth schedule cannot solve the problem. The government has said that it would go for detail discussion on the issue”, said Holiram Terang. However, on 26th of June (2002), the Union Home Minister at the Parliamentary Consultative Committee meeting attached to his ministry said that while the Union Government is committed to all round development of the areas of the autonomous councils, the government is not in favour of creating an autonomous state within the state of Assam.

Karbi Anglong covering 10,434 sq kms is the biggest district of Assam. It has a population of 8 lakh 12 thousand (2001 census) and a literacy rate of 37 percent. Karbi people are ethnically Mongoloid and linguistically Tibeto-Burman. “Karbi, Dimasa, Kuki, Rengma, Hmar etc., predominantly inhabit the eastern part of Karbi Anglong, while the western part is predominantly dominated by Karbis, Tiwas (hill Tiwas), Khasis and Jaintias”, The Enchanting Karbi Hills – Ms Nazmeen Anam.

Two most Dominant Insurgent Groups Operating in Assam: ULFA and NDFB –

United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA):

During the period of the Assam agitation, a revolutionary faction was gaining grounds. This marked the birth of the underground militant organization, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) under the leadership of Paresh Baruah on the 7th April, 1979, at Sibsagar.

The ULFA was born with the ideology of secession from India. They demand an independent Assam. They are quite apprehensive about being called an Indian. Their question is ‘why India when we have everything to survive on our own what has India given us so far’.

The ULFAs came at a time when the community was already burning with frustration. So, when they heard of it, youths in large numbers joined the organization, took up arms. They came as revolutionaries, vowed to liberate the community. In the rural
areas, the people did not really understand the mission and principles of the organization. They only believed that these revolutionaries, who are very much a part of their society, are fighting for the betterment of the entire community. This was the kind of response, the ULFAs gained at the time of its infancy.

But things have changed now and so are the needs and views of the society. The image which the ULFAs enjoyed at the time of its inception has undergone a sea change today. Masses are now frustrated with this violence which has failed to improve their condition in any way.

The ULFAs are well trained in most forms of sophisticated warfare and has in its possession highly sophisticated weapons. The ULFAs has training camps in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan.

Today there are 34 insurgent groups in the state representing various minority communities. The ULFAs which occupy the centre stage out of these many organizations, has strong nexus with several national and international extremist groups.

Today the ULFA whose several camps in Assam has been unearthed, is again regrouping itself, as known from police sources. 9 ULFA militants were killed and 13 were arrested in the month of April, 2002, while 11 other militants surrendered. In March 2002, 15 were killed and 18 arrested, while 14 were killed and 36 arrested in February. Altogether, 15 militants were killed and 29 nabbed in anti-insurgency operations in January this year (2002). During the said period activities of the outfit has also reduced. In the first four months of this year, the outfit has killed two security force personnel and thirteen civilians.

Intelligence reports state that 300 youths have been recruited from different parts of the state within the month of April, 2002. While Union Home Ministry added that ULFAs have a nexus with the ISI of Pakistan. The outfit which has consolidated their bases along the Indo-Myanmar border, have procured huge cache of arms and ammunition from Bangladesh February this year (2002). The arms include AK series
rifles, SLRs and grenades. Arms consignments are sent to ULFA camps in Bhutan. It is to be noted here that Pakistani ISI agents are involved in the supply or arms and ammunitions to several militant groups in the northeast. *(Courtesy: Police Sources)*

**National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB):**

The NDFB is an extremist outfit of Bodos demanding creation of a separate ‘Bodoland’ comprising the areas north of the river Brahmaputra. The NDFB has been resorting to violence ever since its formation in 1988.

The NDFB is most active in Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Darrang, Sonitpur, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Goalpara and North Lakhimpur districts.

Since 1994, 1st January, NDFB has been responsible for the death of 900 people. The outfit has been creating unbearable violence thereby making life miserable for the non-Bodos residing in the area. In 1996, the fight between the Bodos and Santhals claimed the lives of nearly 200 Santhals. This incident rendered nearly 2 lakh homeless.

The outfit’s main source of income is extortion and kidnapping. Their main stay has been the tea companies of the region. When security forces of Paneri security camp under the Darrange district arrested the treasurer of NDFB, acquired 7.2 lakh in cash who said that the outfit annually collects an amount ranging from 1 lakh to 20 lakhs from the tea companies and businessman and transfers the same to certain banks of Bangladesh. And also the outfit receives a yearly tax of 1 crore 5 lakh rupees from the tea company, Williamson Megor mostly in American dollars.

Civilians and business establishments are served with regular notices for payment of ‘tax’ and ‘donations’. The NDFB has introduced a certain ‘Bodoland tax’ from the people in various districts of Lower Assam ranging from Rs. 4000 to Rs. 20,000 depending on their financial position.

Official documents reveal that the NDFB has huge amounts of funds in American and Nepalese currency.
Face to Face with a Militant:

Interview with the Vice-Chairman of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), Prodip Gogoi:

Q. What are you fighting for? What is your demand?

Prodip Gogoi (PG): Sovereignty of Assam. We want independence from India.

Q. Why?

PG: What has India given us till today. We have always been given a step motherly treatment. Go back to history and you will find that India has always exploited us. We have resources, but what are we getting out of it. Nothing. The oil refineries we have are just puppets in the hands of the central government. From the resources we have, the production we do, we get negligible amount of returns from the centre. See for instance in the case of employment, how many Assamese are employed in the oil sector, which has enormous employment potential. We are against this imperialistic design of the Government of India. Now we want a separate homeland, all resources to ourselves.

Q. What about the Assam Accord signed with the then Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi in 1985. Are things not going according to the terms of the Accord?

PG: That was all a ‘flopshow’.

Q. Are you ready for talks with the Government of India?

PG: Yes, we are. But we have three conditions.

- We will talk of sovereignty of Assam.

- Talks should be held outside India, in a third country.
• We want a representative country of the United Nations Organization to sit as a
witness. But no as a participant. We do not want its participation.

But before that we would like the government to create atmosphere for such a talk.
Now it depends on the central government.

**Q. What do you mean by such an ‘atmosphere’?**

PG: We want the Central Government to declare ceasefire. The army should be called
back.

**Q. What hopes do you have from the Vajpayee Government?**

PG: We are not concerned about the government in the centre. No matter whoever
occupies power. All we need is government initiative for talks. They have to create
atmosphere for talks.

**Q. From 1985 to 1990, the official report states that 125 civilians have been killed by
ULFA. Out of this 121 were non-Assamese people. What is the reason behind
killing non-Assamese people. Do you think you can achieve your goal by killing
non-Assamese people?**

PG: We kill people who are against the good of Assam, the people who has no
sympathy for the common good of Assam. And in this fight for the cause of Assam we
do not see to which community the person belongs to. We kill all those people who are
not sympathetic to the cause of Assam. And this includes Assamese as well.

**Q. How far is it true that cash can earn security? Is it true that people who can
fulfill your demands (Financial) can lead a secured life?**

PG: This is not true. We punish the guilty, the corrupted.

**Q. So you demand money?**

PG: It is the responsibility of every Assamese citizen to contribute to the organization.
Q. Do you support outside investors in Assam? Do you want the non-Assamese business community of Assam to go away?

PG: We don’t mind if Assam gets the major share of the profit. Our fight is not against the business community. Fight is against the Indian government machinery.

Q. Do you have links with the Pakistani ISI?

PG: (with a smile) no comments.

Q. It is believed that you have training camps in Mynmar, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal and now spreading to China. Your comments.

PG: No comments

Q. You are getting the help of Chinese intelligence. Do you agree to it?

PG: It is all government’s conspiracy. These are baseless news.

Q. You have good relations with the National Democratic Front of Bodoland. Isn’t it?

PG: Yes we have. They are our brotherhood organization. Our support is with all the ethnic tribes and communities of not only the North East India, but with all those organizations and groups of the world, who are fighting for their identity, for the preservation of their culture, their ethnic identity.

Q. Has America’s declaration of ‘war on terrorism’ any effect on your operations?

PG: Let me clarify here, ‘we are not terrorists, we are nationalists’.

Q. What if America declares ULFA as a banned militant outfit?

PG: Future will say. We have not thought about it.

Q. Will Assam be able to survive as an independent country, outside India? What about foreign threats?
PG: Assam will flourish as an independent country. We have resources, we have manpower. We don’t see any foreign threats. We will maintain diplomatic relations with the neighbours.

**Q. Is independent Assam, a dream of ULFA, an organization or of the Assamese people as a whole? Are you confident about the mass support?**

PG: No Assamese will have a problem in forming an independent Assam. We are the United Liberation Front of Assam, we enjoy majority support.

**Q. Are you ready to fight any kind of sophisticated weapons of the Indian armed forces?**

PG: Very confidentially and diplomatically) we have faith in ourselves. Assam problem should be solved by political will, and not militarily. Anyway, more then our guns, Government of India is scared of the brains of Prodip Gogoi, Paresh Baruah and Anup Chetia (the leaders of ULFA).

**Q. Do you hate India?**

PG: (With bitterness) Yes, we hate India, but not Indians. We hate the Indian system.

(Prodip Gogoi is presently facing trial under TADA Court. When the writer, met him, his hands and legs were tied with strong ropes. The person seemed physically weak. He is suffering from orthopedic and neurological problems and has appealed to the Court to take him to Delhi for treatment. Gogoi showed determination and mental strength, when he said, “I may not be physically very strong today but I have 110 percent mental strength”).

**Border Security:**

The central government has many ambitious plans with regard to the problem of illegal migrants from Bangladesh. The government had planned for a second line of defence’ as a back up behind the Border Security Force (BSF), along the Indo-Bangladesh border to check the illegal infiltration. According to the terms of the
scheme, 28 police check posts had to be set up. But till date only 8 police check posts have been set up.

Four of these check posts are set up in the Dhubri section and the remaining four are in the Karimganj sector. Each of these posts is being manned by around 30 security personnel headed by a sub-inspector. 4,000 strong forces have been proposed under the scheme. Out of this, 3,153 posts have been sanctioned by the Union Government. The personnel are to be deployed in 28 police posts with the tactical headquarters.

Ironically, all the personnel under the scheme are being engaged in maintaining normal law and order duties.

Police officials report that due to financial handicap, the state government is not being able to procure the necessary infrastructure required to make the force fully operational.

This massive inflow of illegal migrants are having severe impact on the socio-economic life of Assam. This has increased the burden on the public exchequer, owing to high population growth particularly the unskilled labourers, unemployment, poverty, even increasing crime rate and growing mass discontent.

Dr. Samujjal Bhattacharya, AASU Adviser (the organization who has been most active in the issue of illegal migrants) say that “it is all due to lack of seriousness from the central government.” The leader terming the AGP government as ‘betrayer’ said, “the AGP did nothing to solve this border problem”.

Border security has become a cause of great concern for the northeast today. Particularly, the Mankachar and Karimganj sectors of Assam has been very vulnerable. The 103 km of river border that Assam shares with Bangladesh is proving to be very dangerous of late. The area needs more lighting facility for better patrolling. There are serious defaults in the border fencing as well. There exists are number of holes and cuts in the barbed wires thereby paving way for people to cross.
Now the very porous border between Assam and Bangladesh which has been the route of easy entry of Bangladeshi immigrants is serving as the entry gate for several international militant outfits. This includes the entry of Muslim fundamentalist outfits, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) and Al-Qaeda. During the months of June this year (2002), a group of 15 militants belonging to the Pakistan based HuM has entered Assam through the Dhubri sector. The group has spread into the districts of Barpeta, Morigaon, Nagaon, besides Dhubri. There are also reports of another 20 members of the Al-Qaeda group crossing the border through Baghmara in Garo hills. According to police, these fundamentalist groups are providing arms training to the infiltrators from Bangladesh, thereby encouraging fundamentalism in the northeast. The training is mostly carried out in Bangladesh and Myanmar and then they are moved into the northeast India for operations.

Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA) and Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam (MLTA) are products of such extended dream plans of these fundamentalists outfits.

The Indo-Bangladesh border which is not sufficiently sealed is providing easy grazing grounds for these outfits. Particularly in the Karimganj district of Assam, three river routes and five land routes are often used for infiltration. The Badarpur and Patharkandi areas are very significant in this regard.

A clandestine war zone is being created by Pakistani ISI along with Al-Qaeda in the northeast region of India conspiring with United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and United National Liberation Front (UNLF) of Manipur.

Time is not far off when another Kashmir like situation would turn out in the northeast India.

The security of the borders of the North East is not a regional problem. It is a question of security of the country. While looking at this problem of infiltration it is imperative to keep this fact in mind that Assam is the gateway to the South East and East Asia.
power as big as China exists there. And history speaks a lot about Indo-China relations.

Media needs to play a major role in this aspect. National newspaper should work more on it and make the country aware of the dangerous situation arising in the northeastern part of the country. Electronic media needs to take an active role in this affair. All countrymen should be made aware of the situation and the danger that lies ahead of them.

Assam Economy Today: An Overview

The quagmire of poverty in which Assam is gasping today is an outcome of cumulative inadequate economic policies of successive state governments since independence. The sorry state of economic health of Government of Assam can be envisaged from the fact that since the fiscal year 1998-99 to 2000-01 the grant-in-aid from Government of India has hovered somewhere between 35 to 40 percent. The glaring mismatch between the revenue raised by the state government on its own in 2000-01 versus 1999-2000 shows an upward trend of 16 percent whereas for the corresponding period the grant-in-aid has shot up by 17 percent. All the above highlights the fact that without the centre’s assistance to the state exchequer that too in the form of grant in aid managing the state economy is a difficult proposition (Courtesy: CAG, revenue receipts, for the year ended 31st March 2001).

The budget which estimates a total expenditure of Rs. 15588.55 crore for the year 2002-03 against total receipts of Rs. 14502.52 crore, leaving a deficit of Rs. 1006.03 crore. With a deficit of Rs. 1594.03 crore opening balance for the year, it is estimated that the year would end at a deficit of Rs. 2600.06 crore.
Population below poverty line has reached 40.86 percent in Assam as against the national average of 35.97 percent (as per the CAG report for the year ended 31st March 2001)

It is true that a deficit budget highlights the future plans of any government to economic upliftment of any society. But the 2002-03 budget highlights the fact that a deficit of Rs 1006.03 crore in the current fiscal year and with an opening deficit balance of Rs 1594.03 crore, it is for any layman to comprehend the fact that the Rs 2600.06 crore deficit is planned either for economic upliftment of the state as a whole or more truly highlights the fact of gross inadequacy for the state government to raise revenue by itself to plan for any future development.

Going by the projection the trend of 16th percent growth in the total receipts by the state government for Rs. 5637.64 crore we can safely project a figure of Rs. 6539.66 crore not to mention the increase of 17 to 18 percent in the grant-in-aid from the government of India in this total kitty, the figure of Rs. 15588.55 crore for the year 2002-03 is rather debatable.

Assam today is in a whirlpool of economic disorder where major amount of the budget estimates is going in repayment of loans. The outstanding debt of the government of Assam which stood at Rs. 8441.33 crores as on 01.04.2000 rose to Rs. 10013.13 crores as on 01.04.2001. The loans outstanding to the central government as on 01.04.2001 constituted 53 percent of the total loans outstanding. And market borrowings amounted to 23 percent of the total outstanding debt. As per estimates, the outstanding debt as on 01.04.2002 is projected to increase to Rs. 11351.39 crores. During the current year, the total debt servicing liabilities as per the budget estimates is Rs. 1856.22 crores, out of which Rs. 1288.15 crores is on account of interest payment.

Hence it is clear that debt servicing accounted for about 72 percent of the fresh debt contracted, that means nearly three-fourth of it is going for repayment of old loans.
“the gravity of the situation can be readily appreciated from the fact that annual debt servicing costs are projected to increase from Rs. 866 crores in 1997-98 to about Rs. 1586 crores in 2004-05”, according to the Memorandum to the 11th Finance Commission. So, in 1999-2000 Assam received from the central government an amount of Rs. 1090.34 crores and repaid an amount of Rs. 1185.22 crores, which means net funds available stood at (-) 84.88 crores. That is there is net negative inflow of central assistance. Assam is repaying more than what it receives.

Ironically, the 11th Finance Commission has awarded a meager amount of Rs. 110.68 crores to Assam under the special category state wherein state like Nagaland received Rs. 3536.24 crores “Union Minister Arun Shourie has admitted that there was some mistake in calculation as a result of which Assam got the least among all states under the special category state”, Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi informed.

One significant factor leading to the drying up of the state exchequer is the wasteful employment of unnecessary labour in the public sector which invariably leads to the huge burden in terms of payment of salary and wages. In 1992-93 it was Rs. 1269 crores which rose to Rs. 4913 crores in 2002-03. The Comptroller and Auditor General report clearly shows that the total of the budget estimates, as on 2001-02, 47 percent goes in paying salary and 27 percent on development of the state. In 2002-03 this amount has increased to 54 percent in salary and 18 percent on development of the state. That means expenditure on salary has increased by 7 percent and development has declined by 3 percent. Thus, the mounting expenditure on salary and wages has been eating the vitals of the state economy.

Now the state exchequer has dried up to such an extent that employees in most of the government undertakings have not received salaries for one year on an average. Ostensibly employees are resorting to strike and protests.

So the Chief Minister of Assam has given a memorandum to the Prime Minister asking for an economic package for the state. The state government has demanded for a grant of 1000 crores or moratorium for the central loan for a specified period of time.
Assam has 49 public sector enterprises out of which only one, Assam Gas Company is earning profit. “We will try to rejuvenate all those units which are still in a viable state. For the rest we are going for disinvestments and privatization. We are also introducing the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS)”, informed Pradyut Bordoloi, former Minister of State for Industry and Finance, government of Assam. The government has provided for VRS for the employees of Assam State Electricity Board (ASEB) and Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC) to streamline these units. But for the rest of the units no concrete steps have been taken so far. Though the government is talking of disinvestment and privatization, no positive outcome is seen. No takers have come so far for Assam Tea Corporation even. So disinvestment policy has a long way to go to achieve success. Assam has mainly three important sources of revenue generation, that is the forest and oil. Tea industry is having adverse international market for the last couple of years. This has its severe impact on the state economy. In terms of oil and forest, “due to adhocism followed by the ministry of petroleum, our oil royalty has been more or less stagnant as well as irregular. And timber revenue has depleted after the ban imposed by the Supreme Court”, says the Chief Minsiter Tarun Gogoi in his memorandum to the Prime Minsiter.

Shortfall in collection of revenue varied from 5 to 22 percent during 1995-96 to 1999-2000. Revenue receipts in 1999-2000 includes: tax revenue 1224.76 crores (25 percent), non-tax revenue 444.92 crores (9 percent), receipts from government of India 3171.26 crores (66 percent). Revenue receipts from state enterprises is very disheartening. In the year 1999-2000, the government invested Rs. 460.38 crores, and received 0.1 percent as return.

In this grim and gory situation adding fuel to fire is the massive amount of corruption at all levels of administration. There is huge amount of leakage of sales tax at checkgates in the national highways. Trucks coming to the state are held at these gates belonging to the taxation, transport, excise, forest and agriculture marketing departments of the state. These checkgates are leased out to private bidders at amounts rising to several crores of rupees. But due to large scale corruption and extortion at these gates government is incurring losses of several crores and it has attributed to an
increase in prices of goods procured from outside the state. A little initiative and vigilance by the state government this year earned an increase in revenue collection from Rs 84 crores in the year 2000-2001 to Rs104 crores in 2001-02.

Assam is basically an agri based economy. But surprisingly enough, very little development is seen in this sector. The state till date does not have the provision of cold storage as a result of which farmers sell their produce at a much lower price to middlemen leading to black marketing of products. Moreover, there is no definite marketing strategy for agricultural products. Consequent being the state resorting to outside buying of foodgrains at much higher costs. (Agriculture sector is discussed in detail in the next chapter).

Years of neglect has lead to the present state of crises. Assam is capable of multiple cropping. The state has irrigation potential. But again lack of monitoring has led to poor utilization of irrigation potential resulting in unproductive expenditure. Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General says that for the year 2000-01, irrigation potential created was 26,578 (in hectare), while potential utilized was only 1022. That means only 3.84 per cent. The average percentage of utilization of irrigation potential was 5.35 per cent during the period 1994-95 to 2000-01, which was negligible. In terms of power, total installed capacity in 1995-96 was 552.4 MW and power generated was 1422.7 MKwH. While showing a declining trend in power generation, with an installed capacity of 574.4 MW in 1999-2000, generation of power was only 867.0 MKwH. Consequent begin procuring of power from Meghalaya State Electricity Board, NTPC, NHPC and NEPCO.

Flood and erosion are two most damaging features of Assam costing heavily on the state exchequer. So far only short term measures have been taken producing no permanent solution to the problem.

As a policy to cut down expenses, the government has made higher education costlier by cutting down 15 percent grant to colleges which has led to large scale protests by college teachers.
The committee on Fiscal reforms formed under Haren Das, former Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, which is still under consideration states that 2 percent employees should be reduced every year for the next five years. This commission has earned wide scale criticism, as such a step by the government would add fuel to the already burning fire of unemployment. Today only registered unemployeds cross 70 lakhs, and if both registered and unregistered are taken into accounts, it comes to nearly a million! Yet it has to be agreed that the present crisis of Assam demands reduction in expenditure and increase in revenue. For that employees in the government sector has to be reduced. And simultaneously, avenues for employment has to be opened, in the way of improving the law and order situation so as to attract outside private investors. And atleast for a couple of years the state must be given respite for repayment of loans. And before taking up all these steps, complete transparency in the government has to be maintained so as to curb corruption and misutilization of resources.

To sum up, the GDP at constant prices for 1993-94 is Rs. 6733 for Assam and Rs. 11632 for all India in 1999-2000, a huge gap of Rs. 4899. With the 9th financial plan of 9 per cent growth in GDP and conservative estimate by various agencies of 5.5 to 6 percent the contribution of Government of Assam to the all India average will be very miniscule.

**Assam Agriculture :**

The share of the agricultural sector in Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) of Assam at constant prices (1993-94) prices 36.3 per cent and at current prices 37.8 per cent in 1999-2000. The soil and climate of Assam in conducive for cultivation of rice, which occupies around 70 per cent of the gross cropped area and more than 90 per cent of the total area under foodgrains. Assam experiences about 1460 mm of monsoon rains, that is from June to September. Agriculture in Assam is mainly dependent on rainfall. The state has about 39.41 lakh hectares of cropped area. But there is always food shortage leading to annual outflow of Rs. 2,000.00 crores.
The state is less dependent on *rabi* crops. Area coverage under *rabi* crop is around 28 per cent of the total cropped area during 1999-2000. But a good development in the agricultural front of the state is that area under summer rice, the principal crops of the *rabi* season, has been increasing in recent years. This is mainly due to installation of shallow tube-wells in the state. During 1999-2000 the area under summer rice increased to 2.95 lakh hectares from 2.24 lakh hectares in 1998-99. The area under rice is 26.46 lakh hectares achieved during 1999-2000 surpassed the targeted area of 26.00 lakh hectares for the year. The state has installed 10671 shallow tube wells in 21000 hectares. The yield rate of total rice during, 1998-99 in Assam was 1345 kgs per hectare as against 1930 kgs per hectare for the country as a whole in the same year. The year 1999-2000 was a good year in comparison to the two previous years, that is, 1997-98 and 1998-99 so far as agriculture sector is concerned. This is due to the fact that the state was spared of severe floods which is a regular hazard that state agriculture has to face every year.

Other disrupting factors of the agricultural sector include, fragmented land holdings, inadequate irrigation facilities, low fertilizer consumption, poor rural infrastructure, weakness of the credit delivery system, decline in ground level credit flow, lack of development of Rural Non Farm sector etc.

Apart from other crops and vegetables, I would like to cite the example of potato cultivation which is a victim of the mentioned hurdles. On an average an estimated cost of Rs. 500 crores per year, is spent by the northeast in buying potatoes. Majuli, the river island of Brahmaputra, offers such good conducive soil for potato growth that healthy potatoes can be grown without even using fertilizers. But since there is no developed marketing policy or government policy to provide market to the agricultural goods, the products rot in the traditional indigenous godowns in the villages. There is a wide gap between the producer and consumer.

Humidity is very high in the climate here, the moisture content of the agro-based products is very high. So these cannot be stored in the traditional godowns for a very long time. Need of the hour is cold storage facility along with a proper marketing
policy and improvement in the transport system. This is particularly true for horticulture. There occurs 30-40 per cent loss in case of the horticultural crops during post-harvest period due to lack of infrastructure for storage and processing.

Interestingly, only 17 per cent of the roads in the state are black topped and only 77 per cent of villages are electrified.

"Logistic and infrastructural facilities namely, road network, railway network and air service are inadequate. Although major parts of the north east are connected with major roads, inadequacy is very evident in respect of rural road... agricultural marketing system is very unorganized and under-developed. Market infrastructures are very poor. The marketing system is fully dominated by private tenders and large chain of middlemen. Institutional market functionaries are totally absent despite existence of a number of institutions. Buyers' dominance at the primary stage of marketing is frequently much evidenced, which has been possible due to existence of area and commodity specific monopoly. Pre-harvest sale, credit linked marketing is very much evidenced. Farmers receive almost a throwaway price ranging between 16-28 per cent of a consumer rupee, which psychologically hinders them to go for extensive cultivation and deployment of technical inputs for higher productivity." *(courtesy: NEDfi).*

This year owing to the implementation of Shallow Tube Wells scheme through NABARD and ARIASP, Assam has become rice surplus state within a short time thereby encouraging farmers to turn towards commercial production of paddy. But the problem arose here is that of procurement. There is no procurement done in the state either by the state government or by FCI. Thus the farmer is robbed of his price support. The state today also produces fruits and vegetables close to 40 lakh MT. Sadly enough even in the peak production season, the farmer fails to get the minimum cost of plucking.

There are a host of other very valuable herbs and medicinal plants, orchids and a whole range of flowers that can be developed if only infrastructure and market processing chain with all necessary linkages is developed. Sericulture is another area
with vast potential in the state. The state produces four verities of silk namely, *muga, eri, tussar and mulberry*. If proper marketing is done this can emerge as an export item since it has great urban demand.

Then comes the question of agriculture credit flow. There is a distinct downward trend in the credit flow in the state and inability of the financial institutions to reach a large number of the prospective entrepreneurs. The coverage of the banking network in the region is inadequate. In Assam the average population covered per branch is estimated at 20,270 (2001 census) as against the national average of about 14800. Even the existing banking network is unable to extend adequate credit flow to the agriculture sector due to the poor recovery climate prevalent in the region. In Assam the percentage of recovery to demand was only 18.33 per cent in respect of Commercial Banks (CB). All the five Regional Rural Banks (RRB) in the state have shown negative growth rate in the recovery performance during 2000-01. This might be attributed to the frequent occurrence of natural calamities that affect the borrowers. Recycling of loanable funds is also difficult due to inadequacy of a strong legal framework. The inadequacy of public investment in agriculture and rural sector has become a matter of great concern as it has led to substantial loss of potential income and employment to the rural society. The Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme is still in its infancy in the state. Here only 9580 cards have been issued till date, since inception by all banks.

Farm mechanization is also very limited here. There are practically no combines, threshers, transplanters or other machinery being used, in agricultural operations. In most parts ploughing is still done by farm animals which results in inefficiency and delays in the cropping cycle. This invariably affect crop productivity. Further it has to be mentioned that nearly 10 lakh hectares of land remain unutilized for a period of about five to six months (December to May). This is primarily due to lack of irrigation facility and mechanization.

*Irrigation and Power*:
The gross irrigation potential of the state is estimated at 27 lakh hectares comprising 17 lakh hectares from surface water and 10 lakh hectares from ground water sources. As per Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) the utilizable water resources available for irrigation is estimated at 1.92 million metre (mham) against which the present utilization is about 0.125 mham which is less than 10 per cent. The CGWB, further stated, that the water level in the shallow aquifer of the Brahmaputra basin has been rising alarmingly at the rate of 0.80 to 3.27 m during the last 10 to 12 years. Apprehensions arise that if this increase continues, a significant portion of the Brahmaputra basin will be converted into marshy land, unless this rapidly increasing groundwater reserve is utilized through the use of STWs.

There is almost 350 MW of off-peak power available in the state that can be utilized for agricultural operations but the main stumbling block in implementing this is the very poor level of electrification in the rural areas. It has been estimated that almost 30 percent of the electrically operated irrigation schemes are not in operation mainly due to disconnection of power due to non-payment of energy charges, defective transformers, removal of transformers to other places, mechanical defects, change of river course, and siltation at lifting points and the like. The availability of power during the peak-load period (5pm to 10pm) in the state is about 530 to 550 MW. This includes power purchased from NEEPCO, Meghalaya State Electricity Board and that generated by the state. During the off-peak load period (10pm to 5am) of 18 hrs a day, the demand comes down to about 170 MW to 200 MW during 10pm to 6am and 200 MW to 250 MW during 6am to 5pm. Thus during the period of 10pm to 5pm (18 hours), a major portion of the available power of about 350 MW. This remains un-utilized due to lack of demand. Thus, during the off-peak-load period (10pm to 5pm) under utilized available power of about 350 MW can be made available if proper and effective infrastructure for distribution of un-utilised utilizable power of about 350 mw to irrigation installation is created. Augmentation of the present distribution system special preference to rural electrification and irrigation installations can also serve the purpose.
Another very significant hurdle in the face of agriculture development in the state is the laid back attitude of the government. "Assam government has failed to take advantage of the centrally sponsored schemes for agricultural development due to lack of initiative on its part", said Mr. Ajit Singh, Union Minister of Agriculture. He further said that the state government has failed to submit utilization certificates, proposals and project reports required to take benefit of the centrally sponsored schemes. While the Agriculture Minister of Government of Assam complained that the Food Corporation of India (FCI) is not procuring rice in Assam in the Minimum Support Price. This is the result of strong lobbying in the central government where the representatives of Assam has failed to voice their opinion in pursuance of such issues of the state. Lack of initiative of the state government is evident from the fact that National Co-operative Society was compelled to withdraw Integrated Co-operative Development Scheme meant for Hailakandi and Cachar districts of Assam only due to failure of the state government to take steps to implement the same.

A practical experiment carried under the Integrated Farming System at the Regional Agricultural Research Station, Nagaon, in a total area of 6,046 m² including 2329 m² water body for a fishery-cum-poultry-cum-duckery; the remaining area for field and horticulture crops and apiary. With intensive cropping, integration of the enterprises and recycling of by-products a net income of Rs. 27661 per year was obtained. An evaluation study by the Fisheries Research Center, Assam Agriculture University, Jorhat in six districts of Assam for horticulture-fish, and in nine districts for pig-fish farming showed that fish production was increased by 1.53 tonnes per hectare with introduction of piggery/horticulture in fish farming.

There experiments provide enough evidence of the potentiality of the state if optimum use of resources is made.

Ironically till today the state does not have a proper agriculture policy.

Horticulture, pisciculture, animal husbandry are the related sectors which has immense potential but still in its infancy. The state is rich in fresh water resources covering an area of about 3.65 lakh hectares.
Policies on papers are quite adequate for the mobilization of resources, but lack of accountability and monitoring of the government has led to corruption and thereby sucking of resources by middleman. The benefits does not reach the beneficiaries.

As in the case of installation of Shallow Tube Wells (STW). In order to bring an additional area of 2 lakh hectares under assured irrigation, the agriculture department of the state, decided to install one lakh STWs during 1999-2000. With estimated cost of the project was Rs. 230 crore. The project was financed by NABARD and Government of Assam. The record of Director Agriculture, Assam, reveal that out of one lakh pump sets ordered only 93206 were supplied between November 1999 and June 2001. The government stated (June 2001) that 99285 pump sets had already been installed and till date a total sum of Rs. 107.67 crore has already been spent and balance Rs. 30.45 crore is yet to be paid as per supply orders placed with different firms. However, the implementing agency (Agriculture Department) also stated on 10th July 2001 that out of 99285 pump sets, 6079 pump sets are either lying with the field engineers (consignee) or with concerned supplier and that supply of remaining 715 pump sets (1,00,000-99285) is yet to be made. Evidently, 6794 pump sets (6079 plus 715) worth Rs. 8.29 crore are yet to be supplied and installed. (CAG for the year ended 31st March 2001, civil).

Similarly, test-check (Sept. 2000) of records of Manager, District Poultry Farm, Jorhat, revealed that the farm had remained non-functional since March 1994 as it did not have birds. Attempt was also not made to procure birds. But its employees enjoyed the benefits of salary and allowances from March 1994 to March 2001 thus, resulting in unproductive expenditure of Rs. 22.76 lakh.

The present government has initiated a lot of steps for the enhancement of agricultural sector. But lack of monitoring diminishes everything to zero. For instance, the present Congress government in the initial ten months of its existence, that is the period between 18th May 2001 to February 2002, for the modernization of agriculture, had distributed 150 tractors and 420 power tillers under Macro Management Mode and another 203 tractors under ARIASP at subsidized rates to farmers and Field
Management Committees respectively. But another instance of misappropriation of funds in the distribution sector can be cited here which would state the efficiency of such schemes. Assam Agro Industries Development Corporation Limited, a joint venture of Central and State governments, reveals misappropriation and embezzlement of stock by the employees. The amount misappropriated has amounted to Rs. 91.90 lakh.

Here I placed certain instances of misappropriation of funds allotted for the development of agriculture only due to lack of honest and strict monitoring.

*Food problem*:

Flood erosion and drainage congestion are problems creating havoc in Assam every year, disrupting agriculture and human settlement. Development in agriculture cannot be sought without having a permanent solution for the menacing flood problem. The flood is usually caused by incessant rainfall during the monsoon season which normally commences from the month of May and remain till mid-October. In 1998, the highest flood was recorded in the first week of September affecting about 70 lakh people and the total value of damages was estimated to be Rs. 500.00 crore (approx). This flood claimed the loss of 86,224 during 1999 a total of 2.23 lakh hectares of area were affected by floods resulting loss of crops valued at Rs. 50.46 crores, besides causing harm to human lives and cattle. Government reports state that 72 numbers of critical flood and anti-erosion schemes under the central sector funding are yet to be completed. The reason being non-release of funds. During the ninth plan period the state received Rs. 18 crore, in 1997-98. However, out of this amount only Rs. 10 crore was actually received as Rs. 8 crore was deducted at source as interest. Repeated appeals to the central government to convert the Central Loan Assistance to central sector schemes have failed to move Central government so far. The 15th meeting of the Committee of Ministers for Economic Development of North Eastern Region has resolved that flood control measures in Assam should be recognized as infrastructure development in view of the fact that such measures protect other infrastructures like roads, railways, power and agriculture. Then Flood Control Minister, Bharat Chandra
Narah said, "Govt of India, Ministry of Water Resources be moved that flood, drainage congestion and erosion problems of Assam being perpetual chronic and classic in the country should not be a regional problem only. The management of the vexed and chronic problem is beyond the resources of the state government… the union government should recognize the problem of flood and erosion of the state as a national problem of very high magnitude having national and international ramifications and come forward with generous financial assistance."

Assam accounts for 9.4 per cent of the total flood-prone area of the country. The National Flood Commission estimated the area vulnerable to floods in Assam as 31.60 lakh hectares against 335.16 lakh hectares in the whole country. The main cause for floods in Assam include adverse physiographic of the region, heavy rain fall, excessive sedimentation, frequent occurrence of earthquakes, reduction of the forest area, encroachment of the revenue area etc.

**Current report (August 2002) on floods:**

The floods starting from June 21st 2002, affected 6,77,999 families in 7142 villages of 19 districts of the state. More than 7 lakh hectares of crop land has been affected.

According to the state agriculture department, upto July 31st 2002, 53,313 hectares of Bao rice, 35,395 hectares of Ahu rice, 1418 hectares of sugarcane, 22,458 hectares of jute, 27,635 hectares of Sali seedlings, 1,93,933 hectares of transplanted Sali, 24,736 hectares of pulses, oil seeds and vegetables and 3,44,112 hectares of uncovered crop area were submerged in the current wave of floods.

This year (2002), Dhemaji is the worst flood – affected district in Assam where 30,000 people have been affected in 83 villages. Rail and bus communication have remained cut off from rest of the country for several weeks.

Another, evil cropping up in Assam today is artificial floods affecting Gauhati and some other areas due to excessive destruction of forest land and unaccounted cutting of hills. This is causing massive drainage congestion and pollution of ground water. As per information available from the State Forest Department, the total area under
forests in Assam was 20.24 lakh hectares at the end of March 1999 out of which area under Reserved Forests was 17.42 lakh hectares. Thus, reserved forests are constituted about 22.21 per cent of the total geographical area of Assam.

**Environment degradation:**

Official papers claim that forest cover in the state is 26 per cent, while the actual cover as per remote sensing data is only about 16 per cent. While as per international norms, the forest cover in the plain areas should be at least 33 per cent, and it should be 60 per cent in the hill areas. Encroachment has rose to such an extent that forest department statistics of 2002 says that 23,191 bigha, 4 katha and 6 lechas of settlement area of the government land in Gauhati city is under encroachment. Over 27,508 hectares of reserve forest areas in and around the city is under encroachers. More dangerous is the fact that, a total of more than 143 square km. of land falling under different National Parks (NP) and Wildlife Sanctuaries of the state are under encroachment. Of these National Parks and Sanctuaries, areas under encroachment is given below – Kaziranga NP – 50 kms, Manas NP – 17 sq kms, Dibru-Saikhowa NP – 3 sq kms, Nameri NP – 5 sq kms, Orang NP – 8 sq kms, Pabitora WSA- 2 sq kms, Laokhowa WSA – 4 sq kms, Burachapor WSA – 28.50 sq kms, Barnodi WSA – 6 sq kms, and Sonai-Rupa WSA – 19.50 sq kms.

The Central Forest Department of Government of India had issued a strict directive to the Civil and Forest authorities of Assam in pursuance of a Supreme Court directive to evict all encroachers. Accordingly, the government’s massive eviction drive this year began on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} of May, 2002., this began in the Bathahguli locality of Punjabari area of Gauhati, where forest officials were welcomed by stones and brick bats by violent encroachers, leading to the death of one person. Political patronage behind these illegal settlements had led to the emergence of mushrooming growth of villages of doubtful citizenship particularly, in the National Park areas. Because interestingly these encroachers are enjoying electricity connections and telephone connections even.

Media’s role is immense in these areas. Such issues need to be highlighted.
Most of these encroachers are illegal immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh and Nepal. Bangladeshi migrants are posing a great threat to the society and economy of the state. This epidemic growth of migrant population is branching its roots to the entire northeast. It is ostensible that these will encroach forest land, cut hills and kill the much valued wildlife thereby changing the entire demography of the land.

Particularly, national dailies should take upto this issue with utter concern. Contribution of national newspapers in this case is of utmost importance.

There is yet another case of encroachment that is taxing heavily on the government finances. That is encroachment on the ceiling surplus land by the tea estates. Hence, government is losing heavily on the sales tax and revenue of the same.

Political patronage in the settlement of immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh is highly responsible for altering the demography of the state and disturbing the civil society of the people. Kaziranga wildlife sanctuary, world famous for its one-horned rhinos, has become the victim of political games. Vast areas of the jungle has been cleared for settlement of migrant population, thus making life miserable for wild animals. There is constant felling of valuable trees either for human settlement or for smuggling purposes. Such human atrocity is costing heavily on the life and habitat of wild animals. Clearing of forests and felling of trees is causing massive soil erosion and floods in these wildlife sanctuaries. Hundreds of animals die every year in such calamities. Thus compelling elephants and other animals to move out to nearby villages for survival.

As this mushrooming settlement of migrant population is serving as a heavy vote bank to politicians, state administration prefers to put a blind eye to this issue of ecological balance or environment degradation. Moreover, presence of various militant outfits in the deep jungles also threatens the forest department security personnels to delve deep into the matter.

Hence, if timely and adequate measures are not taken by the state government, the much prized possession of the state, its forest resources would survive no more.
Political parties must come out of these selfish motives and adequate well equipped security personnels should be employed in the forest areas.

**Investment opportunities:**

Assam offers great investment opportunities. There are rich deposits of coal, gas and oil along with forest reserves in the state. Moreover, 40 per cent of India’s assessed hydro-electric potential exists in the northeastern region. The center has offered a number of incentives for investment in the north east in the last couple of years. The New Industrial Policy for the region provides an extension of the Transport Subsidy, a 15 per cent Capital Investment Subsidy, 3 per cent Working Capital Interest Subsidy, total exemption from income tax and excise duty for 10 years and a comprehensive insurance policy where the center will pay premiums for up to 10 years. The state governments have also provided incentives such as subsidies on capital investment and sales tax exemption.

Assam has rich deposits of oil and natural gas, limestone, clay, glass sand, coal, granite, mica, gypsum base metal etc.

**Oil and Natural Gas:**

Assam accounts for nearly 50 per cent of on-shore crude oil production. The state has the 4 refineries, which is the maximum number that any other state has. Moreover, it is the only state where both Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India Limited (OIL), the two explorations and crude oil producing companies of India have a significant presence. Assam was the first state to have a gas based power plant in the country as well as in Asia. It also has first gas based fertilizer unit and the only integrated refinery cum petrochemicals complex in the country (Bongaigaon Refinery and Petrochemicals limited). It has the oldest and the longest cross country pipeline (1158 km) for transportation of crude oil and one of the longest product pipelines in the country as well. The state is endowed with oil shale reserves capable of sustaining crude oil production of 140 million tones annually for 100 years.

**Coal and Limestone:**
There are reserves of over 703 million tones of limestone and 320 million tones of high grade variety in the North Cachar hills and Karbi Anglong district of Assam. Coal reserves amount to 320 million tones. Coal found in Upper Assam and the Central Assam highland have a high sulphur content and high volatile matter content, thereby reducing its coke ability.

The state offers immense potential in terms of floriculture, food processing medicinal and aromatic plants and bamboo based industries to specify a few.

**Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL):**

Numaligarh refinery of Golaghat district of Assam, dedicated to the nation by Prime Minister A B Vajpayee in 1999, the most well equipped and sophisticated refinery of the region is facing crude oil crises today. The refinery adopting state of the art technology is designed to process 3 MMTPA of indigenous crude oil. Because of the unique configuration of Crude Distillation Unit-Vacuum Distillation Unit-Delayed Coker Unity-Hydrocracker Unit combination of Numaligarh refinery, the refinery is designed to yield 87.2% total distillate out of which 73% is middle distillate only (superior grade kerosene and diesel). This yield is one of the highest in the country. It is one of the energy efficient refineries in the country. Design energy factor is only 110 MBTU/BBL/NRGF which is one of the lowest in the country. It is one of the most environment friendly refineries in the country. For safe disposal of refinery waste gases, a ground level non-illuminating Flare system has been installed which is the first ground flare system in the country. But in-spite of having technology of such high standard, with an installed capacity to produce 3 million metric ton yearly, the refinery has been able to use only 60 percent of its capacity. For the current year the refinery has fixed a goal of producing 2.176 million metric ton. Last year the refinery earned an amount of Rs 2500 crores which is much less as compared to the refinery’s installed high standard capacity.

Official sources informed that no steps have yet been taken by the central government to increase crude oil generation in the northeast and no interest has been shown for the same.
This is a matter of great concern that even after having the two significant oil exploring and crude oil producing companies of the government of India, the ONGC and OIL, a refinery of such high potential like NRL is starving for raw material.

**Assam Petrochemical Limited (APL):**

Fate of Assam Petrochemicals limited, (APL), has been struggling under the price like of natural gas. Its position is further aggravated by the downward trend of international price of petrochemical products. Coupled with it is the hike of prices of domestic natural gas and power. The gas price increased from Rs 950, in 1998 to Rs 1400 in 2000 per 1000 SCUM. This increased to Rs 1700 from April 2002. interestingly, M/s Reliance Assam petrochemicals Ltd (RAPL), has been given gas at a concessional rate of Rs 600 per 1000 SCUM against Rs 1400. APL has submitted a memorandum to the union minister of petroleum pleading for such a concession.

**Tea:**

Assam accounts for 55.5 percent of the total area of 4.34 lakh hectare under tea cultivation in the entire country. Assam has an area of 2.36 lakh hectares under tea plantation. The state has 1081 tea gardens. State government earns land revenue of Rs 3,39,77,316 per year from the tea gardens. Now since, it is seen that tea gardens are encroaching government land for a long time, outside their revenue area, it is decided in the assembly that the government should initiate steps to regularize the land by imposing penalty if necessary. That would boost the land revenue collection.

The major tea companies having tea estates in Assam include the Tata Tea, Rossel industries, Eveready Industries India, Warren Tea, George Williamson (Assam), Assam Company, Goodricke Group Limited, Dhunderi Tea. Out of these only George Williamson (Assam) which has its registered office in Assam, exports from Gauhati. The others have headquarters in Kolkata. The state assembly on the 1st of April this year (2002) unanimously passed a resolution demanding that the big tea companies, having gardens in Assam, should shift their headquarters to the state.
Poor infrastructural development is one of the significant reasons of tea companies not shifting their headquarters to Assam. Moreover, there are records of insurgent creating life miserable for tea officials in Assam. A secured and peaceful atmosphere together with good transport and communication facility would definitely induce tea giants to operate from headquarters in Assam. Introduction of international flight may serve as a bonus point in solving the problem.

On the government’s front the situation is grim. The Assam Tea Corporation (ATC) of Government of Assam, is the owner of 14 tea gardens scattered over the six districts of Nagon, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Sonitpur, and Karimganj. But now these tea gardens are running into huge losses due to negligence of the successive state governments. The losses of four districts barring some gardens in the districts of Nagaon and Karimganj, has touched a total of Rs 23 crores. During 2000-01, the ATC, had produced 57 lakh kg of made tea, but the production went down to 48 lakh kg in 2001-02. Production of tea in the Upper Assam gardens is showing a declining trend. Upper Assam gardens are producing 800 kg per hectare whereas the production in Nagaon and Karimganj districts stands at 1400 kg per hectare. Now with a liability of Rs 100 crore, it is not feasible to revive ATC. The government is going for disinvestments of tea gardens now. In its 28 year old history, the ATC has suffered loss for 18 years, the Chief Minister Mr Tarun Gogoi informed.

**Border Trade:**

Assam is the gateway to the South East and East Asia. It has proximity to countries like, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan and China. 98 percent of north east’s external borders have boundaries with the said countries. Assam shares 263 kms of border length with Bangladesh which includes 103 km riverine.

“Particularly Bangladesh can serve as a large market for the goods of the north east.” “The ties between east Bengal (Bangladesh) and North East which got scrapped due to partition needs to be restored fully to improve the trade and transit between these two regions. Bangladesh has vocational advantage in supplying the north east with various
goods and services and Bangladesh could also provide a market to the north east for several agricultural products, cement and limestone and other industrial products. Simple border trade of small quantities would benefit local communities on either side and would be important in itself quite apart from substantive inter-country trade”, -- Dr PD Shenoy Secretary, DONER.

In the pre-independence period, there existed several water and rail routes between the northeast and East Bengal. Now if these routes are revived better trade relations could be developed. The traditional water route along the Brahmaputra, Meghna/Barak and Karnaphuli if revived could enable Indian vessels to navigate through Bangladesh between West Bengal, Dhubri and Karimganj in Assam via Chittagong to Demagiri in Mizoram and vice versa. This could extent market to Bhutan and Myanmar.

**Media in Assam – an Analysis:**

Print media has been playing a significant role in the socio-political condition of Assam. Media owns a great responsibility to the political developments of the state. Particularly the role of vernacular newspapers are of great significance in this regard.

The highest circulated Assamese language daily in the state today in the Asomiya Protidin, with a circulation of 1.20 lakh.

This newspaper has a wide coverage and has great political impact. It has been very vocal and significant in unearthing various scandals of the AGP government and has great impact on the general public. The daily relies on investigative journalism and stand as a vibrant critique of the government.

But it is felt that the newspapers is a bit inclined towards sensationalism. There is more establishment of personal opinion of the reporter than pointing out actual facts. This is a true for most of the vernacular newspapers.

Monoram Gogoi of *Asomiya Protidin* opined, “we deal with stories from the humanitarian perspective. When people are insecured of their lives and property due to insurgents or any other element in society, they turn to the state. But when the state
turns-hostile, whom will they turn to. Obviously it is the media whose support they need. We as media persons feel this social responsibility and do stories emphasizing the human aspect of the issues”. He further said that people can identify themselves with the stories we carry. We speak their language. It is only because of that we are the highest circulated daily.”

The Assam Tribune is the highest circulated English daily of Assam. It is also the oldest publishing house of the northeast region.

Assam Tribune has an all together different perspective of looking at issues. The daily does not believe in creating any kind of sensation but relies more on actual facts. Individual criticism or opinion of the writer is not revealed much. It is reporting of factual details.

There are reasons for that. Assam Tribune has become the tradition of Assamese life. It has reached such a high degree of popularity that struggle for survival is not the question now. The high quality of news with authenticity and good analysis has earned the faith of the public. Newspaper reading forms a habit of the people and Assam Tribune has become that habit now.

Another English daily of significance is The Sentinel. The daily carries good analytical editorial which reflects in-depth study and research.

Newspaper is a competitive business. The competition within the vernacular press has increased manifold owing to cropping up of numerous regional language dailies in the last couple of years. Since so many newspapers have come of late, struggle for survival is the need of the hour. It is ostensible that to flourish, sensational news is necessary. Because, it will be an overestimation to judge every reader to be an intellectual who looks for analysis. Since, most of the regional language dailies have a flourishing rural market, they need to cater to the needs of the rural reader. And a place like Assam where 89 percent of the population resides in villages, it is imperative on the part of the newspapers to satisfy this vast rural market. Hence,
appears this sharp line of difference between the stories of English and vernacular dailies.

National dailies have entered the Assamese life of late. Today, The Times of India, Hindustan Times, Telegraph, The Indian Express and Asian age have come out with four pages of northeast news. But they are a new entrant and yet to gain acceptance of the public. “A local resident of Assam would obviously not read a national daily to get the local news. For that he would read his local daily”, views Barun Dasgupta, Special Correspondent of the Hindu, Gauhati.

Electronic media has a long way to go in Assam.

**Budhbar:**

A significant role was played by Budhbar, an Assamese daily, published from Gauhati, in the socio-political life of Assam. Parag Das, who was later assassinated by extremists, was the founding editor of this highly circulated daily.

*Budhbar* was born in the year 1989. From April 1989 the daily ran successfully for five years upto 1994. The daily is no more in existence now. Its Assistant Editor, Monoram Gogoi who is now the feature editor of Asomiya Protidin (the highest circulated Assamese daily of the state today), talks about the role of *Budhbar* from an all together different perspective. Mr Gogoi said “*Budhbar* was the only daily who openly dared to discuss the activities of ULFA. We might be branded today as the mouthpiece of this ‘pressure group’ but we actually informed the society the real truth”. He further said that *Budhbar* opposed the activities of ULFA when the outfit indulged into something wrong. But they even supported it when they realized that a certain act of the outfit was good. Who are the ULFAs? They are a product of this very society where we are residing. These young men were forced to take up weapons by the prevailing circumstances of their times. They are our brothers. Youth is a strong force of the society. When this force is not mobilized properly, and are led to stray away, to face financial crunch and the evils of unemployment they resort to violent means. So, when they do something good we as media persons, support them and we
do oppose when they do something bad”, Gogoi said. Terming certain demands and
questions of ULFA as genuine, Mr Gogoi said, “ULFA has spoken certain truths like
how New Delhi is exploiting us, taking away all our natural resources paying a meager
royalty. The ULFAs took up the issue and questioned the government for the masses,
the local people. If media would have supported such good and genuine demands of
the ULFAs then it would have proved to be a good potent force”. Speaking about the
ULFAs, Gogoi said that initially they worked with the people, gained large scale mass
support. But it was only when in the early 1990’s when the center deployed armed
forces in the form of operation Bajrang and Operation Rhino and started killing the
militants inhumanly without any trial, that they resorted to merciless killings. Mr
Gogoi, further said that Budhbar, which is said to have kindled the fire of insurgency
in Assam, has actually always supported issues for which they were fighting. “We
strictly condemn the merciless killings they resorted to, and we also condemn the
atrocities of the armed forces not only over the militants but also over the innocent
common people”. “ULFA problem is actually a political problem ought to be solved
through proper political discussions and not through force. Media should have placed
their objectives in a better way. National dailies always termed the ULFA problem as
only a law and order problem and not a political one. While other dailies of Assam
remained silent on the issue we bravely spoke about it”, opined Mr Gogoi.

Public opinion today stands contrary to the views of Mr Monoram Gogoi. Readers feel
that Budhbar served as the mouth piece of the insurgents and thereby glamorized their
image. “The paper created hero out of the ULFAs”, recollected a senior person of the
Government who spoke in terms of anonymity.

**Attitude of the people- Media’s Role in the Changing Society:**

Like any other developing society Assamese mind is also infested with the germ of
excessive dependence on the government. As Dr Dhiren Bezbaruah, Editor of The
Sentinal says, “a person hardly after passing matriculation examination knocks the
doors of the government for a job”. A clerical level job in the government sector is
considered much more prestigious than running a shop or involving in agriculture.
Thus opening more avenues for the government officials to indulge in corruption. People does not mind offering bribe of thousands of rupees for a clerical level job in the government departments. Because government job means less work, no professionalism or competition and ample avenues of corruption. This lazy, laid back and escapist attitude of the people has washed away the work culture. Their confidence level has decreased with no strength to take risks, always feeling the need of a protective cover thus killing all instincts of research, creativity and ambition.

Assamese as a community has always been very emotional, getting easily, moved by sentiments. This has induced political leaders and other vested interest groups to easily motivate the masses for their selfish motives. Emotion can be a positive force, if motivated in the right direction. Here comes in the role of the media Adequate stories of developmental issues, educating the people of their rights and duties, highlighting their problems and prospects, making them aware of their resources and potential would definitely bring in a sea change in the society. Right from the days of the Assam Agitation of early 1980’s following all political developments including insurgency, the general psyche of the Assamese community can be studied and the consequents thereafter. Utmost significance here is that of print media. In Assam politics, media has played a tremendous role in the falling and establishment of governments from time to time. Now if media takes on this great social responsibility of creating a sound economy and a progressive social structure, a great positive social change can be predicted. In six years of Assam agitation, rise of insurgency, unpopular Prafulla Mahanta rule and the preceding issues has occupied place of prominence in media. Sensational news has had its share in the society. That media has to serve as a political critique there is no doubt about it but media should not only limit its role to production of facts but should also be a pathfinder of the people. It should be a party to a developed society.

A distinct space should be given to agricultural development issues, discuss problems faced by farmers, their solutions, environment related issues, stories of technological up gradations, thereby making the government more transparent, accountable and
answerable to the electorate. Vernacular media has a more significant role to play in rural sector as it speaks the language of the local people.

Assam is endowed with rich forest and wildlife resources. It incredible scenic beauty is yet to be explored. Kaziranga national sanctuary, famous for its one horned rhinos is in a sorry state today. Illegal feeling of tree by unscrupulous elements has rendered wild habitat a disastrous effect. Killing and smuggling of animals is rampant. And to top it all is large scale encroachment of forest land by doubtful citizens. Similar is the case with other forests and national parks like Manas, Orang and Laokhowa. Government is giving a blind eye to these issues of great concern.

Mere discussions on the potential for tourism development in the state is not enough. On March 2002, Gauhati- Bangkok flight was introduced, thereby taking north east into international air space. But an international airport is not the ultimate infrastructure requirement for developing tourism industry. Proper roads, good lodging facilities and above all security of life is of utmost importance. For most places one has to take the bus route from Gauhati. Though bus services are not bad, but the roads need to be developed. Assam has two lane highways, yet the roads are quite narrow and hence, difficult for two vehicles to cross at a time. Assam’s scenic beauty and its wildlife of rare variety need media publicity immensely. A news report on environment and wildlife appears in the dailies only when there is a scandal or a case of absolute disaster happens. National newspaper’s role is also negligible in this regard.

India’s policy of liberalization of the economy seems to have no effect on Assam’s starving economy. Investor’s are reluctant to come into this insurgent infested violent state.

Emphasis only on evils of society renders negative publicity to a state thereby bringing disastrous effects to the development of the region. A society encapsules both positive and negative aspects. Bringing into limelight the evils of society is also the duty of media. But there has to be a balance. Because in today’s global world, media can make or destroy an issue.
Today the world has come closer due to communication and technological development. It can rightly be called a global village. So Assam’s geographical distance from the mainland of India can no longer be a justification for its present state of emotional distance from the Indian sub-continent. Lack of initiative of the local people of Assam in expressing themselves in the larger national platform cannot be ruled out.

In most cases representatives from Assam in the National level fail to voice their opinion on issues concerning their state and fail to convince the higher order to pursue their objectives. And the public in general lack that jest to work in unison for the development of their state. As I have observed, the Assamese community very rarely reach out to people outside the state. They are contented in their own little space. Professionalism and ambition is lacking in the society.

Discrepancies in the government are many and hence scope of reporting. For instance, price of rice fixed by government per quintal is Rs 530 for general quality rice and Rs. 560 for grade-A rice. But in the open market, price of grade- A rice is Rs. 750, middle quality- Rs. 525 and Rs. 400 for general quality rice.

In terms of rural electrification while the government has taken up the programme as a Plan Scheme, electrification has been completely deadlock in rural areas such as under Bijni sub-division for the last 10 years.

Embankments on both banks of the river Longai from Baithakhal to Raghurtook under Patharkandi Flood Control Department, in the sub-division of Karimganj are quite vulnerable. Not government steps have been initiated so far.

Dhanshiri Irrigation project which started in 1975, after an expenditure of Rs. 152,63 crores have been lying untouched now for want of funds.

The case of public health cannot be avoided here. Malaria occurs in the state every year. According to the information given by the Joint Director of Health (Assam), as many as 55 persons have died of malaria this year (2002). Last year the number was 81 persons. Nalbari and Karbi Anglong are the most affected areas. Interestingly,
though the central government provided 5,20,000 mosquito nets in the year 2000, those could not be used due to extreme quality defects as claimed by beneficiaries.

Public health-facilities need to be looked into properly. Surprisingly, there is no ambulance in the public health centers of Rangapara and Balipara. Moreover, there is dearth of doctors in the rural areas. Doctors inspite of having posting orders in these rural areas do not go there. However, the Government has issued warning to such doctors but against the question of lack of monitoring. Doctors are not complying with the orders.

Print and visual media has to render tremendous service in the development of the state. Assam needs to be explored, its resource potential needs to be glorified. Only such opening up of Assam can build in a new developed Assam. And media needs to take on that responsibility. A state with a literacy rate of 64.3 per cent (government of Assam statistics) is sure to go a long way provided the masses are taken towards the right direction.

And media is the most potent force to do so.

**Conclusion :**

Socio-political condition of Assam today is submerged in a whirlpool of problems which are being created and nurtured by political gimmickry and social negligence. The problems faced by the state today are not at its infancy but are the cumulative accumulation of problems over the years which are assuming a much stronger and dangerous character every passing day.

After going through all the facts and figures of not only the present day but also of its past socio-political developments along with the experience of looking into the society and its conditions from close quarters, I can safely arrive at a conclusion realizing the actual problems of the society.

The root cause of all problems which is providing fertility for the growth of other evils is economic underdevelopment.
Assamese society today is facing the problems of hoarding of money. The gap between the haves and have-nots have been ever increasing. It would be untrue to say that Assam is not getting central assistance. But massive corruption at the state administrative level is standing as a stumbling block to the adequate and equal distribution of money for the development of the economy.

State administration has failed to utilize the sources of revenue generation at an optimum level. Oil, tea and forest resources if used at an optimum level can bring in a sea-change in the economic scenario of the state. Because oil, tea and forest resources can give birth to a host of ancilliary industries. But negligence, lack of monitoring and lack of accountability in the government over the years has closed nearly all doors of income today. For instance, the state owned 14 tea gardens, in its 28 year old history, has suffered loss for 18 years. Now with a liability of Rs. 100 crores, Assam Tea Corporation can do nothing but go for disinvestment. Again the question is that of availability of buyers.

A product of the Assam agitation is the Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL), the most well equipped and sophisticated refinery of the region. In spite of having technology of such high standard, with an installed capacity of 3 million metric ton yearly, the refinery has been able to use only 60 per cent of its capacity. This is due to crude oil crisis.

Of the 49 Public Sector undertakings (PSUs), only the Assam Gas Company is earning profit. Most of them have been closed down. There is massive leakage of sales tax in the state. So, where is the source of income?

Another disrupting factor in the path of state's development in excessive political intervention at all levels of administration. Particularly in the PSUs, most decisions are taken under political considerations. Even top management of the government companies is entrusted either to civil servants of mostly appointment is made on political reasons. It is never right man in the right job. Specialized qualification has never been a criteria for such appointments.
The case of agriculture is also very depressing. According to the 1991 census, about 69 per cent of the total working force are being engaged in agriculture and allied activities. And about 89 per cent of the state's population are living in rural areas. So, for development of Assam the priority sector is the rural sector. But again loopholes in the administrative set-up and inadequate policies of the government has kept agriculture very backward. Technological development is not yet seen in the state agricultural sector. There is no facility of cold storage yet. There is no proper marketing policy. Rural infrastructure, transport and communication is very backward. So, keeping all these hindrances in view, the farmer is compelled to sell his produce to middlemen at much lower price. This entire process of producing and selling leaves the farmer at the same state of hand-to-mouth living. Technological up-gradation or improvement in the living standard of the rural life is an impossibility under such conditions. Adding to the misery of the farmer is the traditional flood problem which has seen no improvement in the 55 year old history of independent India.

This has induced more and more migration from rural areas to urban areas for employment opportunities. The policy of successive state governments, particularly in the last twenty years had been surplus employment in the government sector. Instead of creating avenues of employment, the state government for political consideration, publicity and to maintain the vote banks spent heavily on this absolutely unproductive excess labour.

This has led to diversion of funds for development of state to payment of salary and wages. In the year 2002-2003, 54 per cent of budget estimates is going on salary and only 18 per cent on development of the state. Even then, a number of government companies have failed to pay salary to its employees for 2 to 3 years.

One can very well comprehend the frustration of the masses under such circumstances.

In this already deplorable condition of the masses adding fuel to fire is the large number of illegal infiltration from neighbouring Bangladesh. Bangladeshi migrants are encroaching agricultural lands in the rural areas and the huge market of daily wage earners in the urban areas. These migrants are enjoying political support and patronage
in a big way. They are serving as vote banks to all political parties. The main cause of 6 years of agitation has been the issue of illegal migrants. The issue has always been so sensitive in the society that an entirely new political party like Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) was created, nurtured and brought to power on the basis of this issue. As the saying goes, "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely", the AGP became highly corrupt. Once, in power, the party totally forgot the issue of illegal migrants.

Mass discontent and frustration is obvious under such circumstances. One cannot stop the growing rate of crime, violence, insurgency and brain drain under such a situation. With availability of fertile ground within the state, and sensitive international borders providing easy transportation of ideas and weapons, terrorism has immense market in the state.

A state which has always experienced communal harmony is today witnessing birth and growth of fundamentalist groups like Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA) and Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam (MLTA).

In such a state of terrorism and violence, outside private investment is a far cry. Though the government today is talking of disinvestment and privatisation of PSUs and giving immense benefits of tax and other facilities in the New Industrial Policy, not to speak of foreign companies, the big players of the Indian market are showing reluctance to invest in Assam. The reason being security of life and property.

Now the state government submerged in debts of several crores of rupees, with pressure of payment of salary to its employees alongwith tackling the security problem is gasping for survival. It is in a whirlpool of disorders, both economic and social. The state administration has failed considerably to unite all the tribes and communities of the state to create a stronger and peaceful state. The Bodo tribe is fighting for an autonomous territorial council and so are a number of minority tribes. The Bodo movement has grown quite violent in the last few years. Common life of the otherwise very peaceful community has been deteriorating every day.
Assam is in a very vulnerable state today. Combination of unemployment, poverty and terrorism can be very deadly. The growing market of international terrorism which brings with it foreign money and powerful weapons is certain to attract the unemployed, impoverished, frustrated young generation.

As noted economist Dr Jayanta Madhab says, "Make agriculture your business". Agriculture taken up with a pure professional profit motive will bring about a reawakening in the rural areas, providing the farmer with financial security and all round development of the rural society. Developed agriculture means developed infrastructure, good communication connectivity, better rail-road facility and best of all stoppage of brain drain. Because, once educated, youth in the rural areas turn towards cities for a better higher standard of living. Their qualification serve as a hindrance to their age-old agricultural life. But a technically developed village with adequate source of income will surely resist educated youths from moving out thereby solving the unemployment problem to a large extent. For this it is essential to go for an attitudinal change of the people. More and more institutes of vocational training should be opened in every nook and corner. Because at this juncture of the economy, there is very less need of higher secondary and college graduates. Today the society needs more technically qualified people who can be self employed and also create employment opportunity for others. Moreover, this would lead to technical upgradation in farming and cultivation.

Media's role has been very significant in the Assamese society. It has always been a very strong critique of the government. Now it has to be more vocal and vigilant about the socio-political conditions so that the state administration becomes more accountable and answerable to the electorate.
Malaria claims 44 lives in State

By A Staff Reporter

GUYALATI, March 9th—The Joint Director (Health) of the Indian Medical Association (IMAJ) of Assam has ordered a complete blood test of all patients with malaria in the state. As of now, 44 people have died due to malaria in the state. The Joint Director said that the state is under a state of emergency due to the high number of cases of malaria. The state government has declared a state of emergency to prevent the spread of malaria.

ULFA, J-K ultras have ISI links!

By A Staff Reporter

ULFA, the front of the J-K ultras, have ISI links. The joint director of the Indian Medical Association (IMAJ) of Assam has ordered a complete blood test of all patients with malaria in the state. The director said that the high number of malaria cases is due to the ISI links with the ultras. The state government has declared a state of emergency to prevent the spread of malaria.

The joint director of the Indian Medical Association (IMAJ) of Assam has ordered a complete blood test of all patients with malaria in the state. The director said that the high number of malaria cases is due to the ISI links with the ultras. The state government has declared a state of emergency to prevent the spread of malaria.
পটুনতার রাজভবনের অধিকারী কোঁটি টক।

তেজ লগার বাটেডি পাব হুলি ২০০১

একাদশ প্রতিটেক্তার প্রতিযোগিতায় প্রথম হয়েছে।

প্রশিক্ষণ ও যোগাযোগ কেন্দ্র প্রশিক্ষণ ও যোগাযোগ কেন্দ্রে অনুষ্ঠান সমূহের অংশ হিসেবে প্রদর্শিত হয়।

প্রশিক্ষণ ও যোগাযোগ কেন্দ্রের সুরক্ষিতাধীন পাহাড় ও লতাগুলো নির্মাণের সময় প্রত্যেক পর্যায়ে সাফল্য লাভ করে।

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

2. Tarun Gogoi, Chief Minister, Assam.
4. Dhiren Bezbaruah, The Sentinel
5. Barun Dasgupta, Special Correspondent, The Hindu, Gauhati
6. Dr. Samujjal Kumar Bhattacharya, Adviser, AASU
7. Samim Sultana Ahmed, Dainik Agradoot
8. Monoram Gogoi, Asomiya Protidin
9. Haren Buragohain, Press Secretary, Dispur
10. Keshab Kalita, Asom Bani
11. PP Singh, Special Correspondent, The Times of India, Gauhati
12. Employees of Dispur Secretariat
13. Media persons of Gauhati
14. Dr. Jayanta Madhab
15. Amiyo Kumar Das Institute of Social Research
16. Manas Mahanta, Aaji
17. Helena Murmu, Advisor Santhali Adhivasi Mahila Association

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18. Dodhi Saren, Joint Secretary, Assam, Santhali Sahitya Sabha, Sonitpur District
19. Kanai Murmu, President, Assam, Santhali Sahitya Sabha, Kokrajhar District