



ASIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

[ACHR has Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council]
C-3/441-C, Janakpuri, New Delhi-110058, India Phone/Fax: +91-11-25620583, 25503624
Email: secretariat@achrweb.org; Website: www.achrweb.org

Embargoed for : 21 August, 2012

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR MINORITIES: COMMUNALISING ASSAM RIOTS?

1. Introduction

On 11-12 August 2012, a team of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) consisting of Planning Commission Member, Dr. Syeda Hameed, Advisor Dr. G. B Panda, and Member of NCM, Keki N. Daruwalla visited the riot affected areas of western Assam.

The NCM's report was covered in the press on 16 August 2012 suggesting that it was released on 15 August, India's Independence Day and an official holiday. On 16 August 2012, in one hand, *The Indian Express* in its front page reported about fleeing of over 6,000 people hailing from North East India from Bangalore because of threats and fear of attacks, *The Hindu* on the other hand reported about the findings of the NCM that the conflict was unequal as the Bodos were killing Muslims with AK 47s and there is impending fear of militant Jihadis supplying arms to Assam.

The report of the NCM contains biased and inflammatory comments with the potential to radicalize Muslims and increase the risks of the North Eastern people who have nothing to do with the riots in Assam but being attacked simply because of their "Tibeto-Mongoloid" features.

There is a clamour growing demanding the visit of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) as the Bodos are scheduled tribes. A report by the NCST focusing on the rights of the tribals at this moment is neither likely to contribute to the reconciliation nor undo the communalisation of the riots in Assam by the NCM.

By 20 August 2012, about 50,000 people hailing from various parts of North East have fled from mainland India. A majority of them are Christians and therefore fall within the mandate of the NCM. It is deeply regrettable that the NCM instead of protecting these minorities have actually made their situation more vulnerable by compromising independence and impartiality that is least expected from a National Human Rights Institution. The NCM must not repeat the mistakes raised in this report.

Suhas Chakma
Director

2. Is NCM communalising Assam riots?

Conflicts over land, resources and identity are not new in Assam. These often remain localized even in Assam. Portends were clear about an impending clash between the Bodos and the Muslims. On 6 July 2012, two persons belonging to Muslims were killed at Anthihara under Dotma police station in Kokrajhar district by unidentified persons. On 19 July 2012, two student leaders belonging to All-Bodoland Minority Student's Union (ABMSU) and All-Assam Minority Student's Union were shot at near Kokrajhar by unidentified people.

In alleged retaliation of these incidents, four Bodos were killed on 20 July 2012.

These killings triggered a spate of attacks and counter-attacks across Kokrajhar, Chirang and Baksa districts in the Bodoland Territorial Administered Districts (BTAD), as well as in Dhubri district, which is outside the BTAD.

IN THIS ISSUE

1. Introduction	1
2. Is NCM communalizing Assam riots?	1
i. Minorities in Western Assam: Did NCM violate its mandate?	2
ii. NCM's failure to ensure parity during the field visit	2
iii. Ill-timed release of the report: NCM adding fuel to the fire	3
a. Attacks on the North Easterners	3
b. Release of the report by the NCM to the media ill-timed	3
c. NCM's failure to stand up by the North Eastern minorities in mainland India	4
3. Conclusion: Should NCST visit BTAD to counter the NCM?	4
Annex I: Report of the NCM	5
Annex 2: News clippings from <i>The Indian Express</i> and <i>The Hindu</i>	8

However, the State Government of Assam failed to address the root causes like illegal immigration or learn any lesson despite the following riots since 1993:

- October 1993:** Bodos and Muslims clashed in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts leading to displacement of 18,000 persons
- May 1996:** Bodos and Adivasis clashed in Bongaigaon district leading to displacement of 2,62,682 persons
- September 1998:** Bodos and Adivasis clashed in Bongaigaon district displacing 3,14,342 persons
- September-November 2005:** A total of 1,7980 families consisting of 43,819 persons were displaced in Karbi Anglong district due to ethnic clashes between Karbi and Dimasa tribals
- August 2008:** Bodos and Muslim clashed in Darrang and Udalguri districts leading to displacement of over 200,000 people
- March-May 2009:** Dimasa and Naga tribes clashed in the North Cachar Hills district leading to displacement of 11,737 persons
- January 2011:** Rabha-Garo tribes clashed leading to displacement of over 50,000 persons

For the first time, the consequences of the riots in Assam in July 2012 have been felt in mainland India because of the communalisation of the riots. It did not spread to other parts of Assam where tribals and Muslims live side by side but people from the North East India have been facing attacks in mainland India since 8 August 2012 because of their Tibeto-Mongoloid features. The violent protest against the attacks on Muslims in Assam and Myanmar at Azad Maidan, Mumbai on 11 August 2012 was indicative of the impending attacks on the North East people.

Against this backdrop, a team of the NCM visited Assam on 11-12 August 2012 and published a report which further contributed to communalisation of the conflict in Assam.

i. Minorities in Western Assam: Did the NCM violate its mandate?

The mandate of the NCM is protection and promotion of the rights of the minorities who are defined as “a community notified as such by the Central Government” under Section 2(iii) of the NCM Act, 1992. The Government of India has so far notified only the religious groups as minorities. Those who have been notified as minorities are Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Parsis). The NCM’s mandate is therefore limited to religious minorities.

At least 15% of the Bodos are Christians while about 50% of the Bodos follow their own animist religion, “Bathou” and the rest are Hindus. By definition, the Bodos fall under the definition of “minorities” under the NCM Act.

However, the NCM effectively reduced the riots in Assam to “Bodos” Vs “Muslims” wherein Muslims have been defined

as “minorities”, therefore, falling within the mandate of the NCM. The Bodos who are followers of Christianity and animist “Bathou” religion have been effectively defined as a majority in clear violation of the NCM Act.

This extrapolation of “ethnic minorities” not defined under the NCM Act is not a mere semantic but raises fundamental questions about enjoyment of the rights recognized under law and the way an institution such as the NCM supposed to function. Since Indian laws do not define “ethnic minorities”, any extrapolation of the same by the NCM will require clear definition and identification of ethnic minorities.

The feeling of being minority is all pervasive in the Bodoland. The NCM in its report stated that the Bodos are about 30% of the total population in the BTAD. The Bodos consider themselves as minorities in comparison to “Non-Bodos” who by the own admission of the NCM are about 70% of the total population. However, each community feels they are minorities. The Koch Rajbongshis feel minority in comparison to the Bodos. The Adivasis bear the same grudge. The Assamese and Hindu Bengalis too feel they are minorities. The Muslims too feel they are minorities as large majority of the Bodos and Adivasis are Hindus, in addition to the Assamese and the Bengali Hindus.

The NCM failed to identify the minorities as per its mandate or any other extrapolation used for the report.

ii. NCM’s failure to ensure parity during the field visit

The delegation of the NCM visited only one Bodo camp i.e. Vidyapeeth High School at Kokrajhar town and six Muslim relief camps at Jaogliapara, Srirampura, Grahampur High School (Gossaigaon, Kokrajhar), Matiabag M E School (Dhubri), Indira Narayan Academy (Dhubri) and Bilasipara College (Dhubri).

The Vidyapeeth High School is in the heart of Kokrajhar town, the headquarters of the BTAD. The situation in this camp is better than other Bodo relief camps simply because it is in the heart of the town. The NCM has failed to expose the deplorable conditions of the Bodo relief camps outside the main towns. Therefore, the inferences drawn by the NCM are inaccurate.

Further, the report of the NCM is self-contradictory. In one hand, the NCM’s report states, “*Had prompt action been taken after two Muslims were killed on 6th July, or after four Bodos were snatched away from the hands of the police and killed by Muslims, this conflict could have been avoided*”. At the same time, NCM recommends that “*A serious and detailed dialogue between the MHA, State Government and the BTAD led by Shri HAGARAMA MAHILARY is absolutely essential. A forcible mass exodus of non-Bodos from the area, engineered through threats or killings will not be allowed*”. The conflict is not necessarily due to conspiracy to drive out the Bodos but

assertion of dominance by different groups always lead to conflict and these conflicts inflame neighbouring areas.

Further, the NCM concluded “4. *The fact that when Muslims abandoned their villages their houses were looted and gutted might indicate a design to see that they do not return to their own villages. The Bodos who fled from their villages have also in most cases had their houses looted and gutted. Conspiracy theories abound.*”

This conclusion is inflammatory and contradictory. In the case of the Muslims abandoning their villages and their houses being looted and gutted, the NCM concludes that there is a “*design to see that they do not return to their own villages*”. However, the same design has not been stated with respect to the Bodos despite the NCM noting that “*there was no way they (Bodos) could go back as they were surrounded by Muslim villages*”. Further, a plain reading of the content also implies that while the houses of the Muslims were burnt by others, with respect to the Bodos, they “had their houses looted and gutted” as if the Bodos did to themselves.

The NCM failed to ensure impartiality at a time when it is clear that both the Bodos and Muslims are scared to return to their respective villages surrounded by other communities.

It is regrettable that the NCM also failed to make any comment about the failure of the State government to take appropriate action to prevent escalation of the conflict.

iii. Ill-timed release of the report: NCM adding fuel to the fire

a. Attacks on the North Easterners

Though the rest of the people in Assam, other States of North East India and Darjeeling region of West Bengal had nothing to do with riots in the BTAD, Assam, the attacks on the people from the North East India has been building up. The people who were attacked had to be “Tibeto-Mongoloid” origin for the attacks. It did not matter even if the person is Tibetan.

The attacks on the North Eastern people or with Tibeto-Mongoloid features to be precise have been building up since 8 August 2012. The news reports covering the attacks are given below:

On 8 August 2012, a student of Poona College belonging to the northeast was beaten up by a group of eight people in the vicinity of the Poona College. This was the first incident of assault against Northeast people in Pune, Maharashtra.¹

On the evening of 8 August 2012, Infosys employee Kahomdai Panmei of Manipur, who lives in Kondhwa, Pune, was attacked by a group with iron rods and bamboo sticks without any reason. He had gone out to drop his sister to her residence in Shivneri Nagar.²

On 9 August 2012, four students were allegedly beaten by a mob near Poona College in the Pune Camp area.

The victims filed an FIR at the Cantonment police station on 10 August.³

In a separate incident on the same day (9 August 2012), Thuike Ywang of Manipur and a student of Poona College, was beaten up by two persons in Kondhwa when he went to buy rice at a shop around 7 pm.⁴

On 13 August 2012, two persons identified as Sarva Bahadur Devang and Mathiyani were allegedly beaten up by unidentified persons in two separate incidents in Kondhwa, Pune. Sarva Bahadur Devang is from Darjeeling, West Bengal and beaten up suspecting him to be from the north east while he was on his way to home when five men traveling in a car accosted him without any provocation and attacked him on the NIBM road. While Mathiyani was beaten up by two unidentified persons at Shivnerinagar. The police registered two separate non-cognisable cases in connection with these attacks.⁵

On 13 August 2012, a person from Assam, working as a security guard, was allegedly intercepted and beaten up by three unidentified persons in Raidurg, Hyderabad. The attackers also snatched away his mobile phone.⁶

On 14 August 2012, a Tibetan student Tenzin Dhardiya was stabbed on Dhanwantri Road in Mysore, Karnataka allegedly due to his Mongoloid features.⁷

The attacks on the North Easterners have obviously been building up. On 11 August 2012, a mob of nearly 50,000 assembled in Mumbai’s Azad Maidan to protest against the attacks on the Muslims in Assam and Myanmar turned extremely violent. Two youths were killed and 52, including 44 policemen, injured as the protesters went on a rampage, attacking the police, including molesting women constables, burning of media and police vehicles, smashing cameras of photo journalists and damaging buses.⁸

b. Release of the report by the NCM to the media ill-timed

Despite such building up of attacks on the North Eastern people, the NCM selectively released its report which was covered in print edition of *The Hindu* on 16 August 2012 thereby implying that the report might have been released on 15 August, an official holiday. As on date, the report of the NCM is available on the website of the NCM at <http://ncm.nic.in/pdf/tour%20reports/Assam.pdf>

Based on the report of the NCM *The Hindu* reported:

“Bodoland Muslims might turn ‘militant,’ warns minorities panel

There is a possibility that Muslims in the Bodo districts of Assam will turn “militant,” influenced by jihadi outfits from across India, in case their security is not ensured by the State government. This warning was sounded by the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) in its report on the recent communal violence

in Assam and has been communicated to Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi. The report was prepared after it visited the conflict-torn districts in the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD) and Dhubri district in Assam.

...Its report said the cause of the riot originated from the conflict between the Bodos and the resident Muslims of BTAD, and not between Bangladeshi migrants and the Bodos, even though it said infiltration from Bangladesh did take place throughout the year.

“The conflict this time as far as we could see was not between some exodus of Bangladeshi immigrants and the Bodos but between the Bodos and the resident Muslims of the BTAD.”

“The conflict was unequal because the Bodos had leftover arms from the Bodo Liberation Tigers [AK 47 etc]. The Muslims are very poorly armed in comparison,” the minority panel report said, with a warning about the potential jihadi influence on the Muslim population in Bodoland.

“There can be grave danger in future in case militant jihadi outfits from the rest of the country start supplying lethal weapons in this area,” it said”.

These comments of the NCM were like adding fuel to the fire as the North Eastern people were fleeing in thousands from mainland India. While *The Indian Express* in its front page on 16 August 2012 reported about fleeing of over 6,000 people of North East India from Bangalore, other news agencies were reporting about the findings of the NCM that the conflict was unequal as the Bodos killed Muslims with AK 47s and there is an impending fear of militant Jihad supplying arms to Assam.

The NCM failed to note that in order to prevent spread of the communal tension, the authorities of Assam have not disclosed the names of the victims killed or the number of displaced persons from each community. Even the media refrained from such disclosure. Yet the NCM after visiting only one Bodo camp and six Muslim camps gave definitive comments and figures on the number of displaced (roughly 300,000 Muslims and 100,000 Bodos) from different religious communities when no such census was conducted.

c. NCM's failure to stand up by the North Eastern minorities in mainland India

As on 20 August 2012, according to various reports, at least 50,000 North Eastern people have fled from mainland India leaving behind their education, jobs, provident funds etc to an uncertain future. The North East India is also the home of the majority Christians and fall within the mandate of the NCM. The NCM instead of protecting these Christian minorities from the North East India further contributed to their vulnerability and the feeling that NCM is not for their protection even if majority of them are Christians.

5. Conclusion: Should NCST visit BTAD to counter the NCM?

The consequences of the riots in Assam have for the first time been felt in mainland India because of the “communalization” of the riots which often occur in Assam because of the unwillingness of the State administration to make effective interventions. The NCM has its own contribution to this communalisation of the local conflict.

There is a clamour growing demanding the visit of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes that is mandated to protect the rights of the Scheduled Tribes. The Bodos are scheduled tribes and fall within the mandate of the NCST.

A report by the NCST focusing on the rights of the tribals at this moment is neither likely to contribute to the reconciliation that is indispensable nor undo the “communalisation” of the riots in Assam by the NCM.

It is essential that an institution such as the National Commission for Minorities understand their legal mandate (protection of religious minorities), complexities of the issues and history of the conflicts between different communities in the entire State before making ill-timed, inflammatory and biased comments which have the potential to radicalize particular communities and/or increase the risks of other communities such as the North Eastern people who have nothing to do with the riots in Assam. Shoddy reports based on hearsay have the potential to reduce an important institution such as the NCM to be less than independent and impartial. The NCM's reputation is at risk as its report has compromised independence and impartiality; and this is unexpected from a National Human Rights Institution.

Endnotes:

1. Northeast exodus: Cops to secure place from where it all started, Daily News and Analysis, 19 August 2012
2. Mystery attackers target North-East students in Pune, The Indian Express, 10 August 2012
3. Mystery attackers target North-East students in Pune, The Indian Express, 10 August 2012
4. Mystery attackers target North-East students in Pune, The Indian Express, 10 August 2012
5. 2 more from Northeast beaten up in Pune, Daily News and Analysis, 14 August 2012
6. Fearing attacks, several Assamese leave Hyderabad, The Hindu, 15 August 2012
7. Probe into attack on Tibetan student in Mysore under way, The Hindu, 17 August 2012, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-karnataka/article3783366.ece>
8. “Mumbai: Police custody of 23 accused in Azad Maidan violence extended”, CNN-IBN, 19 August 2012, <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/azad-maidan-violence-custody-of-23-accused-extended/283593-3-237.html>

Annex I: Report of the NCM

Report on Visit to Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD) and Dhubri District in Assam

Member Planning Commission, Dr. Syeda Hameed, Advisor Dr.G.B Panda, and Member NCM, Keki N. Daruwalla proceeded to Guwahati and from there to Kokrajhar by road, at fairly short notice on August 11th, 2012. Ms. Sheetal Sharma, North East Network Coordinator also accompanied Dr. Syeda Hameed. We were received at Guwahati airport by Principal Secretary Food and Civil Supplies Govt. of Assam, Shri Shyam Mewara, who accompanied us throughout our tour through Kokrajhar, Gossain Gaon and the Dhubri district, including Bilasipara. We left Guwahati for Delhi on 12th evening.

Our intention was to see the Camps, observe the quality of relief being given and assess the plight of four lakh refugees (roughly 300,000 Muslims and 100,000 Bodos).

Another issue was when the refugees could return to their villages and resume normal life.

The NCM was also keen to probe the flare up and causes underlying the bloody conflict. Assam as a whole and Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD) have had a history of ethnic strife backed by armed groups and terrorist outfits, often aided by foreign powers. Assam had also to face considerable immigration from Bangladesh/East Pakistan over the last half a century. This is one of the major causes of ethnic strife in Assam.

It needs to be mentioned that the Bodoland Accord was struck in 2003 primarily with a view to end insurgency there, to give autonomy to the Bodos and the region, and “provide constitutional protection under the Sixth Schedule” to people belonging to the four contiguous districts which were marked out as BTAD.

The DC and SP Kokrajhar briefed us to the effect that 63 Police pickets were being established in villages throughout the district, each manned by a platoon, mostly of the CRP and a few by the Assam police. (The previous DC and SP have both been transferred)

Both Bodos and Muslims had fled out of fear, and their homes had been looted once they ran.

11,000 houses were gutted. As regards the Camps 22 deaths had taken place.

This report is in two sections – (i) Camps and (ii) Law and Order

Camps

Before we comment on the state of the Camps, the hygiene prevailing, and the food served it would be only fair to say at the outset that the administration was confronted with the herculean task of suddenly dealing with 4 lakh refugees during a torrid monsoon.

The first Camp we visited was the Kokrajhar Vidyapeeth High School which housed 768 Bodos (392 men 396 women and the rest children mostly from Laliapura). Compared to the later Camps we visited, this Camp was comparatively neat. The Bodos appeared frightened and stated there was no way they could go back as they were surrounded by Muslim villages. Muslims had weapons like talwar and dao. Mosquito nets and garments for women had been provided in the Camp. A doctor’s team of NRHM was present. Clothes and utensils had been distributed. A community kitchen run by women inmates ran efficiently.

The Camps where Muslims were housed were in a pathetic condition mainly because of the much larger numbers. For instance, at the Shri Rampur Camp in Guossain Gaon there were 4304 inmates. We visited the Camp in driving rain and wind.

Visit to Torched Houses in Jaogliapara

3 villages Hekaipara, Duramari and Mozabari, dominated by Muslims were torched by miscreants. We met few Bodo villagers who live across the burnt houses but who said that they were not aware who had done the arson. The Muslims outnumbered the Bodo but ran because of the firearms which Bodo possessed.

Relief Camp Srirampura, Gossaigaon and Kokrajhar

There was no electricity and the place was water logged. The rations were lying outside exposed to natural hazards. Inmates stated that the Bodo came in military fatigues and had automatic weapons, so Muslims fled in fear. There were about 1 lakh Muslims in various relief Camps in Gossaigaon. Toilet facilities were minimal with 10 toilets for 4,300.

The inmates named two policemen, said to be terrorizing Muslims, namely, TSI – Tapash Das and IC Rangmai of Sabkata Police Outpost. There was a universal demand for transfer of one Jayanta Basumatary of Sabkata Police Outpost

who was hounding Muslims. When we broached this with the Chief Minister, he told us that his orders for transfer had already been issued.

Many inmates stated that Assam police were silent spectators when firing occurred.

Grahampur High School, Gossaigaon

This was a horrendous Camp, with 6,569 inmates from 31 villages. Because of overcrowding, conditions were abysmal. 25 latrines had been provided for 6000 people.

There were over 30 pregnant women, some of them overdue. They were thin, anaemic and malnourished. No one knew that Government had announced Rs. 500/- per capita for clothes and utensils. For the last 20 days many were wearing same clothes.

People stated their houses were burnt though just 200mtrs from the Police Station but the Police did not act. They alleged that the Assam Police was biased. On 12th August, 2012 we visited:

1. Matiabag M E School, a roadside Camp, Dhubri

No clothes were available for children. They stated that all assets including their cattle were looted. Medicines were not effective. Even their cattle were looted.

2. Indira Narayan Academy, Bilasipara, Dhubri

The Camp had 3,500 inmates from 10 villages, mainly Hekaipara and Duramari where we had already seen the torched houses. The stink around the Camp was horrible.

Some inmates complained that only 200gm of rice per person was given once in five days. This seems unbelievable for nowhere were such allegations made. But some inmates persisted with this assertion. Children were suffering from skin infections.

Inmates complained that FIRs had not been written. This was a general complaint against the Police. There were just three latrines and no place to take a bath. Garbage had not been picked up for 15 days.

Inmates also stated that more men were killed but fewer deaths had been reported.

A man from the Camp went home in Gossaigaon but on his way he was picked up by army. His father has complained about his missing, but no action taken yet.

3. Bilasipara College, Dhubri

The Camp had 2504 inmates (800 women, 1699 men and 258 children) from 6 villages. Some of the expecting women were suffering from fever and mostly from severe anaemia. No one had heard about Horlicks, available in one Bodo Camp.

Among the inmates Guljan Begum's husband Amjad Ali is missing; Rohima bibi's daughter Rojina (12yrs) is missing for 25 days; Rajaul Sheikh (7 yrs.) went to bathe and got drowned; Khodezad Bibi had a bullet wound on a badly swollen hand.

Ambreen Bibi had a gash on the side of her head where she was struck with a sharp weapon. She said all hospital expenses were borne by her and when she went to the Police her report was not filed.

Rehabilitation: The Government has promised a rehabilitation package of Rs.20, 000/- and three bundles of GCI sheets to rebuild houses /or another Rs.30, 000/- in lieu thereof.

Conclusion - In General

While the Administration has worked very hard, the women are malnourished, children unclad, toilet facilities meagre and hardly any place for people to take a bath.

They also complained that their reports were not taken down as FIRs by the Police. Recurrence of violence was a major issue with most inmates.

Law and Order

A few important points need to be flagged here:

1. The conflict between Bodos and non-Bodos whether Muslims, Santals or Adivasis (Koch Rajbansis) has been going on for long. There were ethnic conflicts/riots in 2004, 2006, 2008 and now 2012. (In 1996 also the Bodos tried to drive out the Adivasis – 'Santals' and 'Tea-Tribes' viz., Orang and Munda)

2. Most people feel that this strife is caused because Bodos think that driving out other ethnic people is in their interest. The Bodo population is near the 30% mark in the area. They feel that if their population goes up to 50% and more they will be able to demand statehood for Bodo Land. This is possibly a fallacious premise. The Government needs to tackle the BTAD and especially the Chief Executive Shri HAGARAMA MAHILARY, the BTAD Chief (who was formerly the Chief of the Bodo Liberation Tigers) firmly in this connection.

3. The conflict this time as far as we could see was not between some exodus of Bangladeshi immigrants and the Bodos, but between the Bodos and the resident Muslims of the BTAD. Of course, some infiltration is taking place in all pickets of Assam all the time, but there has been no sudden influx from Bangladesh to trigger off such a major conflict.

4. The fact that when Muslims abandoned their villages their houses were looted and gutted might indicate a design to see that they do not return to their own villages. The Bodos who fled from their villages have also in most cases had their houses looted and gutted. Conspiracy theories abound.

5. There is a big rumour that Bodos will strongly oppose the return of those Muslim refugees who have left the BTAD. This would mean all those in Camps in Dhubri district (which is not a part of the BTAD) may find it difficult to go back to their villages. Any such obstruction by the Bodos need to be stoutly resisted by the administration.

6. The conflict was unequal because the Bodos had left over arms from the BLT (AK 47 etc.),. The Muslims are very poorly armed in comparison. There can be grave danger in future in case militant Jihadi outfits from the rest of the country start supplying lethal weapons in this area.

7. We were also left with the distinct impression that the lower rungs of the police were afraid of taking action against the Bodos, possibly because of the armaments they possessed and the fact that they ruled the area.

Meeting with the Chief Minister Shri Tarun Gogoi :

1. It was brought home to the C.M. that while the task before the administration was indeed stupendous the Camps suffer from poor hygienic conditions and there was fear of inmates falling prey to various diseases. We also repeated that there was no shortage of food.

2. It was emphasized that some political dialogue with Bodos and Shri HAGARAMA MAHILARY, Chief Executive of the BTAD was absolutely essential. The Bodos need to be told firmly that they cannot under any circumstances engineer a mass exodus of non-Bodos. Nor would they ever get statehood this way. The C.M. was requested to kindly consider taking up the matter himself with the Bodo Council.

3. The police must be more forceful with both Bodos and Muslim criminals. Had prompt action been taken after two Muslims were killed on 6th July, or after four Bodos were snatched away from the hands of the police and killed by Muslims, this conflict could have been avoided.

5. More police should be recruited from the minorities. The C.M. replied that as it is, each district has a quota and Dhubri which has 80% Muslim population recruits a majority of Muslims to the constabulary.

6. The danger of Muslims in the BTC becoming militants in the future, in case their security was not ensured, was brought home to the C.M.

Dr. Syeda Hameed
Member
Planning Commission

7. Remedial action was necessary in view of the fact that conflicts in which Bodos were involved have been taking place over the last 15 years. Administration and the police especially have to deal with recalcitrants forcefully.

Overall Recommendations:

1. A serious and detailed dialogue between the MHA, State Government and the BTAD led by Shri HAGARAMA MAHILARY is absolutely essential. A forcible mass exodus of non-Bodos from the area, engineered through threats or killings will not be allowed.

2. The police in the BTAD areas needs to behave much more firmly with law breakers of all communities, including Bodos and Muslims.

3. Most of the FIR's are omnibus, lodged by police itself. Thus specific entitlements of individuals to establish ownership, or recover Insurance money or naming people who committed criminal acts, becomes impossible. Individual reports from those affected needs to be recorded.

4. The idea of investigating major incidents by setting up SIT needs to be considered. This will restore confidence in the justice delivery system.

5. Issuance of ID cards should be legitimised to promote transparency in giving entitlements.

6. Long term rehabilitation plans will have to be developed 'bottoms up' with the help of the people and civil society. Women, young people and children who may have had intense negative experience of trauma will need counselling sooner than later.

7. It is important that parity is maintained in dealing with both sides.

8. Most Camps are located in school buildings and community spaces. Schools need to start soonest so the spaces must be vacated and cleaned before children are allowed in. State needs to provide intermediate shelters such as were provided to Tsunami victims at UT Andaman and Nicobar. This massive work was undertaken in partnership with NGOs'. It is recommended that NGO's across the country who have developed this expertise be mobilised for Assam. After the state has identified the land, the inmates should be given materials, funds and with strict standards pertaining to sanitation be asked to build their own shelters under NGO oversight.

K. N. Daruwalla
Member
National Commission for Minorities

THE HINDU • THURSDAY, AUGUST 16, 2012

Bodoland Muslims might turn 'militant', warns minorities panel

Mohammad Ali

NEW DELHI: There is a possibility that Muslims in the Bodo districts of Assam might turn "militant", influenced by jihadi outfits from across India, in case their security is not ensured by the State government. This warning was sounded by the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) in its report on the recent communal violence in Assam and has been communicated to Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi. The report was prepared after it visited the conflict-torn districts in the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD) and Dhubri district in Assam.

The NCM delegation, that included Planning Commission member Dr. Syeda Hameed and NCM member K. N. Daruwala, visited Kokrajhar, Gossaigaon, Dhubri and Bilasipara in July. Its report said the cause of the riot originated from the conflict between the Bodos and the resident Muslims of BTAD, and not between Bangladeshi migrants and the Bodos, even though it said infiltration from Bangladesh does take place throughout the year.

"The conflict this time as far as we could see was not between some exodus of Bangla-

deshi immigrants and the Bodos but between the Bodos and the resident Muslims of the BTAD."

"The conflict was unequal because the Bodos had leftover arms from the Bodo Liberation Tigers [AK 47 etc]. The Muslims are very poorly armed in comparison," the minority panel report said, with a warning about the potential jihadi influence on the Muslim population in Bodoland.

"There can be grave danger in future in case militant jihadi outfits from the rest of the country start supplying lethal weapons in this area," it added.

The panel has also recommended the formation of a Special Investigative Team (SIT) to investigate the major incidents of violence during the riots in the State as, "this will restore confidence in the justice delivery system."

It has also called for a "serious and detailed dialogue" between the Ministry of Home Affairs, Assam Government, and the Bodoland Territorial Council. Such an interaction, it said, was "absolutely essential." The report also observed that the Bodos think that "driving out other ethnic people" was in their interest and that is why the NCM delegation told the

Chief Minister that "Bodos need to be told firmly that they cannot under any circumstances engineer a mass exodus of the non-Bodos and that they would never get Statehood this way."

Accusing the administration of failing to stop the first round of violent clashes between Muslims and Bodos in the BTAD areas, the delegation told the Chief Minister to instruct the police to be "more forceful with both Bodos and Muslim criminals."

"We were also left with the distinct impression that the lower rungs of the police were afraid of taking action against the Bodos, possibly because of the armaments they possessed and the fact that they ruled the area," observed the delegation.

While visiting the camps of the Bodo and Muslim victims, who fled after their homes were gutted down and looted by arsonists, the delegation expressed concern at the "pathetic condition of the camps where Muslims were housed" and noted that overcrowding was a major problem. Describing the condition at the Grahampur high school camp in Gossaigaon district, the report said: "This was a horrendous camp with 6,569 inmates from 31 villages."

The Indian EXPRESS

www.indianexpress.com

NEW DELHI | THURSDAY | AUGUST 16 | 2012

Amid attack fears, people from NE flee Bangalore

PANIC ■ Assamese leave Hyderabad too, PM, HM call up Karnataka to ensure safety

JOHNSON TA

BANGALORE, AUGUST 15

MORE than 6,000 people from the Northeast fled Bangalore in panic on Wednesday following rumours that they could be attacked like elsewhere in the country, in the aftermath of the clashes between Bodos and migrant Muslims in Assam.

The Bangalore City railway station was flooded with them waiting to board the Guwahati Express scheduled to leave the city at midnight. Most of them were from Assam. The Railways sold as many as 5,600 tickets for the three unreserved coaches on the train. With more people arriving at the station, a special train was scheduled to leave an hour after the express.

Late on Wednesday evening, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde spoke to Karnataka Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar and asked him to ensure the safety of people from Northeastern states. Shettar, who also got a call from Assam CM

Tarun Gogoi, sent Deputy CM R Ashok to the station to assure the people travelling to Guwahati that they would be safe in the state.

Shettar told PTI that police officials had also been using the public address system at the railway station to reassure the people.

Karnataka DGP Lalrokhuma Pachua, who incidentally hails from the Northeast, clarified that no complaints had been filed at any police station on threats or harassment to the people from Assam.

The panic came a day after a 22-year-old Tibetan college student was stabbed by two unidentified motor-bike-born men in neighbouring Mysore, who apparently suspected he was from the Northeast. Although those fleeing Wednesday didn't seem to have heard about the incident, they spoke about violence against people from the Northeast in other parts of India.

Assamese were fleeing Hyderabad too on Wednesday, although the panic was on a much smaller scale and only small groups left by

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

The Indian EXPRESS

www.indianexpress.com

NEW DELHI | THURSDAY | AUGUST 16 | 2012

People from N-E flee Bangalore

two trains during the day, police said. Some of the scare here was attributed to the attack on a security guard in Cyberabad last Saturday even though it was not related to the clashes in Assam.

The hundreds of Assamese at the Bangalore railway station, mostly men in their 20s and a handful of families, were leaving construction, security, retail and office administration jobs after the panic triggered by word of mouth over the last few days.

"There have been attacks on people from Assam and the Northeast in different parts of India. People are saying there will be attacks in Bangalore as well after Ramzan. There were reports of some people from Assam being troubled in one part of Bangalore. We want to go back to our families," said Ranjith, 22, who worked at a retail outlet after arriving in the city about a year ago. "We

have spread the word among all our friends. It may be a rumour but we don't want to take a risk. We want to be with our families in Assam at such a time. We will see the situation for a while and decide if we want to return," said Ripen, 21, a friend and colleague of Ranjith.

Some at the station claimed the government of Assam had sent out a message asking all Assamese to return. "Our government has asked us to return. Our employers and landlords in Bangalore have suggested we go back if we apprehend danger," said Mitra Lal Upadhyay, a security labour contractor who claimed he was sending 40 boys back to Assam as they feared for their lives.

An office boy and security guard at a private firm for nine years, Jayanth, 27, said he was going back because his family was panicking over news of attacks on Assamese

people and the violence in Mumbai was a factor as well. Some employees referred to direct threats of violence after Ramzan being made to them, others referred to an alleged video of a brutal attack in Assam being circulated among Muslims for which reprisals are being planned, while still others referred to alleged warnings from the police itself.

The Bangalore police however claimed they had not initiated any measure asking people from the Northeast to move out of the city. The police seemed unaware of the situation until senior state intelligence officials visited the railway station. "People from Assam are going back home for the festival period, that is why they are present in large numbers," a police official at the railway station said.

In Hyderabad, Kiran Tiwari, director of a security agency that employs hun-

dreds of people from the Northeast and Orissa, said that some of his employees told him they received calls and text messages saying they would be attacked after Ramzan. "I think someone is trying to create mischief and scare them. Some of my staff asked to go home after they received calls from other employees but all of them chose to stay back as of now. I believe it is more about a scare due to everyone calling each other rather than a specific threat from anyone," Tiwari said. Some Bodos who work in restaurants in the city left last week as they were concerned about their families back home due to the violence there.

Hyderabad Police Commissioner Anurag Sharma said that the police were trying to probe the origin of the rumours. But there were no attacks on people from the Northeast, he added.

WITH ENDS, HYDERABAD



Hundreds flooded Bangalore City station Wednesday.

JOHNSON TA

New Delhi