

ASSAM:

Over The Edge

Three documents seem to indicate that the Assam problem is not about to be easily solved.

INTRACTABLE and increasingly aggressive, the Assam agitation last fortnight edged closer to ugly confrontation. The deadline for a Central government decision on the foreigners issue set by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the Gana Sangram Parishad (GSP) expired on May 15 with no sign of progress except an offer by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on May 11 of renewed talks with no specific cut-off year. On May 14, Central and State government officials, and employees of semi-government establishments, banks and private offices all over Assam walked out of work in protest against the "repressive measures" and "victimisation" of participants in the movement. The North East Region Students Union (NERSU) meanwhile intensified liaison with the six neighbouring states and union territories and the bush fire that had begun in Assam seemed to be spreading rapidly through the entire Northeast.

H C Sarin, principal adviser to the Governor, who arrived to take charge in April tried valiantly to put a semblance of discipline in the state administration. Dismissed Chief Secretary R S Paramasivam, who has been posted to the Cabinet Secretariat in Delhi, had left behind a legacy of neglect and chaos. His successor, Ramesh Chandra, and Sarin together ploughed on, regardless of largely empty government offices. Sarin has been named by sources as the next possible governor of Assam, a reorganisation that would leave present incumbent LP Singh four states — Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura. Meanwhile, danger signals mushroomed.

A secret underground society reportedly put out a 35-point programme for total revolution. This was denied and ascribed to *agents provocateur* by agitation leaders.

On May 16, AASU president Prafulla Mohanto — supposedly in hiding but highly eloquent in recent weeks — and acting general secretary Bharat Narah spelt out a two-phase programme: preparation of a citizens' register by collecting details in forms distributed by AASU's activists, and subsequent deportation of foreigners on its basis by AASU itself, if the government "did not act". This followed declaration of Direct Action by the agitationists the previous day.

Seven persons were arrested in Gauhati

after volunteers of the GSP 'wrongly confined' 13 labourers travelling by boat on the Brahmaputra on May 11, accusing them of being foreigners.

Citizenship would be proved, agitation leaders said, if a person could show his or his 'forefathers' names on the National Register of Citizenship of 1951 or the electoral rolls of 1952. Proof of citizenship would have to be according to "constitutional provisions." Finally, citizens would have to possess legal documents showing their acquisition of citizenship.

Certain documents *New Delhi* has located throw new and startling light on the imbroglio in Assam. The first, a Draft

Announcement finalised by the British government on May 8 1947, was rejected by Jawaharlal Nehru and never considered. It contained important suggestions:

His Majesty's Government are satisfied that the best practicable procedure in the time available is to enable different parts of India to decide, through representatives chosen for the purpose, whether their constitutions shall be framed:

- (a) in collaboration with the existing Constituent Assembly;
- (b) jointly with other parts of India; or
- (c) separately.

Project Brahmaputra: The American Hand

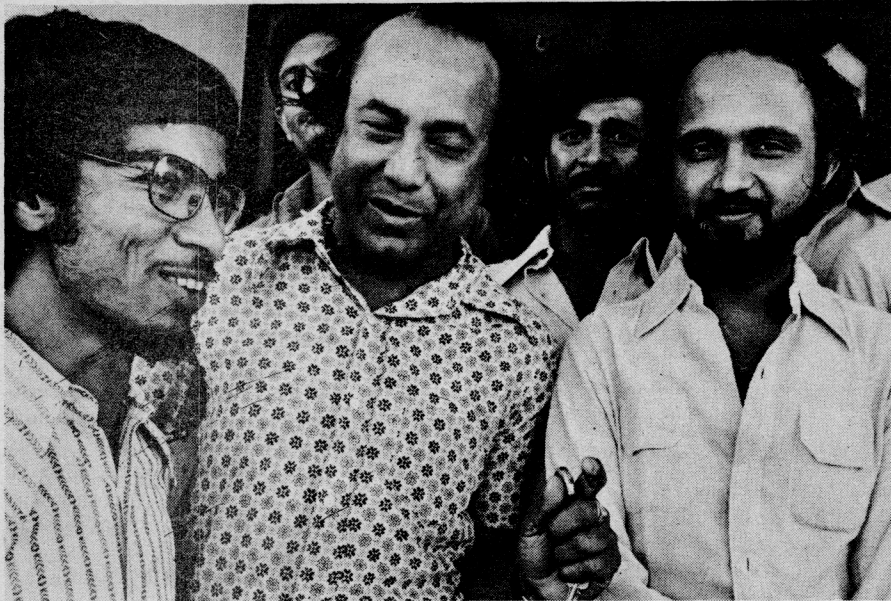
A document that has recently been uncovered by *New Delhi's* Chaitanya Kalbag sheds disturbing light on the possible role being played by US agencies in the North-east. Marked 'Limited Official Use' and 'US Government Printing Office: 1959-519978', and titled **Project Brahmaputra on behalf of SORO in East India**, a secret circular was sent in early 1978 by the United States Information Service (USIS)—which was reorganised on April 1 1978 as the United States International Communication Agency (USICA)—in New Delhi to its counterpart in Calcutta. 'Project Brahmaputra' makes ominous reading. Does it have any connection with events in Assam today? Tersely worded, it is reproduced here verbatim:

"With the agreement of the State Department, the Special Operations Research Office (SORO) of the George Washington University has asked the US outfits in India for help in conducting sociological research in the eastern States of India, including Sikkim as well as Bhutan. The aim of this research is to throw light on public opinion in these regions to establish *in what measure the present status of these States remains acceptable or whether there are indications that the formation of a new State is a current problem.*

"For the conduct of this work, it is necessary to mobilise the entire personnel working in the States of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. You may also make use of local agencies, the staff of which have opportunities of travelling in these regions. You are authorised to sign appropriate contracts with these agencies indemnifying them for the expenses of such travel. *We would have no objection to such agencies making use of educationists or even students to further our objectives.*

"Our organisation has already carried out this type of work in a number of countries with satisfactory results, particularly in helping us evaluate the political situation *and to choose the best ways and means for our own influence there . . .* Past experience in conducting such operations shows that sociological research (sic) in India *must be carried out with such discretion that we cannot be accused, on the eve of the (Assembly) elections, of interference in the internal affairs of the country.*

"In view of the importance of coming political events in India, the carrying out of this research must be concluded early. Details of Project Brahmaputra will follow separately. Please report progress in this respect regularly. The necessary number of questionnaires will be sent to Calcutta from USIA Washington." (Italics above are the author's).



AASU general secretary Bhrigu Phukan (left) and president Prafulla Mahanta flank the Jatiyotabadi Dal's flamboyant Girin Barua.

These decisions cannot be taken by the existing Provincial Legislative Assemblies. The composition of these Assemblies is weighted to give special protection to minorities and does not therefore correctly reflect the true balance of the different elements in the population. (In some Provinces) where there are large and compact minority elements, a decision by the Provincial Legislative Assembly might have the result that large areas would be brought against their will under a Constitution unacceptable to them.

In Assam, the Legislative Assembly

will be asked to sit in two parts, one consisting of members elected from territorial constituencies included in Sylhet District, and the other of members elected from the remainder of the Province... The representatives of Assam (with or without Sylhet) will decide by a simple majority vote on behalf of the area which they represent, which of the three options in paragraph 1 above they choose.

Does this mean that Nehru blocked an Assamese option to stay outside India? This is what leaders of the agitation allege, and the document, which is in the India

The 'bastards' document

জাৰজ কোনা?

বাঙালী বিশ্ব মৈত্ৰ —

ভাৰতৰ বাহিৰে কোনেও নাইনে এটি প্ৰত্যাহ্বানৰ বাবেক কোনা
বা কেইজন—। মোতিয়া এটি প্ৰত্যাহ্বানৰ বাবেক কেইজন
হয় (অৰ্থাৎ বহুলা জাতীয় মানক) তাকেও জাৰজ (বা জহজ)
বুলি কয়।

বাহিৰক দূৰৈত ৰাখি আন্তৰ্জাতিক কোণেট কৰ
নোৱাৰে, সেইজন জাৰজ হয়নে নহয়? বিশ্বৰ জটিল জটিল
ৰে-ট, হেলো, নোণালিমুন, ২-৩-৬-৬, নোনি, বগল, মনুৰ,
খুজাৰ (বাম আদি) আদিৰ সৰা হেঁচাত বিশ্বমান আন্দোলন
আজোৰি জাৰজ কোনা তাক জানিব লাগিব।

আমাৰ সামাজিক আন্দোলনৰ সৰা আমাৰ মাজত
থকা জাৰজ প্ৰত্যাহ্বানক আমাৰ জানিব লাগে।
জাৰজ কোনা?

- (১) নিজনে ব্যক্তিগত প্ৰাৰ্থিত আন্দোলনত জড়িত থাকে।
- (২) নিজনে প্ৰাৰ্থিত প্ৰত্যাহ্বানৰ কোনো আন্দোলনত অংশ
নকৰে।
- (৩) নিজনে নিজৰ মেৰা এক সাংবিধানিক আন্দোলনৰ
নেতৃগণক আশ্ৰয় দি নেওচি পৰিভ্ৰমণত লগ লাগে।

Office Library in London, seems to corroborate their grouse, although it was only a draft and was never implemented.

The second document, a cyclostyled pamphlet in the Assamese language distributed in Gauhati recently, is rhetorically titled 'Who is a jaroj (bastard)?' and makes interesting reading:

When a child has a number of fathers (that is, the mother is a harlot) it is called a bastard. We can recognise various kinds of bastards amongst us in the current movement in Assam.

Definitions of a bastard:

— one who participates in the movement out of self-interest;

— one who does not help the cause of the movement to save the motherland;

— one who ignores the call of the leaders of this constitutional movement and goes after the castrated 'all-India' leaders;

— one who opposes this movement;

— those who do not let others join the movement and themselves do not participate in it;

— one who pleads for the cause of the foreigner;

— one who supports the wrong policies of the alien government;

— Those government employees—including policemen—who do not realise the significance of this movement and adopt a non-cooperative attitude;

— those acting at the behest of outside powers who try to create divisions among the primary organisations of the movement and thus aim at crushing it ultimately; and

— those non-Assamese residents of Assam who, while not participating in the movement, criticise it.

If you come under any of the above categories, and end your life! If you do not, then spread this message by getting copies of it made. Otherwise the tribe of the 'bastards' will multiply, and Golden Assam will come to nought. Long live Mother Assam!

This is the overt manner in which the Assamese people are made to toe the line. Being labelled a 'bastard' appears to be synonymous with being ostracised socially—a painful prospect for any local inhabitant.

The speed with which the agitation has gathered strength, and the seemingly insoluble problem the government in Delhi is confronted with, are alarming indicators of what lies ahead. Mrs Gandhi, it is reported, wants to withhold a stern clamp-down until after the Assembly elections. By then, if events in the North-east are an indication, it may be too late.

— Chaitanya Kalbag in Gauhati