

# **India - Bringing Bangladeshi Angle to Assamese Ethnic Conflict is Disservice to the Nation**

Friday 10 August 2012, by [TRIPATHI V.K.](#) (Date first published: 6 August 2012).

The ethnic violence between Bodos and Muslims in Bodo territorial region of Assam is a national calamity. It has taken a toll of 65 innocent lives (besides the scores of people missing) and rendered 4 lakh homeless. The first priority of sane polity and responsible government is to restore the trust between the warring groups, Bodos and Muslims, without the slightest of ill will against any of the communities and isolate miscreants from the masses. Muslims are poorer, have lost more lives and fled in larger numbers (up to 80%) but Bodos are no economic elite. The creation of Bodo Territorial Council (covering 4 districts - Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baxa and Udalguri) by the Center in 2003, has given a section of them an upper hand but masses of both the communities are in hardships.

I spent three days (August 3 to 5) in the area, visited relief camps - 2 Bodo camps in Kokrajhar (with 560 and 1500 people) , 1 Muslim camp in Kashipara (960 people), 1 Muslim camp in Dhubri (360 people) and 3 Muslim camps in Bilasipara (2000, 2500 and 3500 people), visited a Muslim village Bhadyagudi, a mixed Bodo-Muslim village Bhatipara and met a cross-section of people. I also met Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Kokrajhar Mr. Jayant Narlikar, DC of Dhubri Mr. Kumud Kalita and Principal, Vice Principal and Librarian of Bhola Nath College, Dhubri.

I saw no trace of Bagladeshi offensive in the conflict, so systematically and vigorously orchestrated by BJP and VHP, led by L.K. Advani, Tarun Vijay and Praveen Togadia. They are playing with the lives of people and poisoning atmosphere for future. Bangladeshi is more of an abuse to humiliate Muslims who are native Indians. There may be a few percent Bangladeshis (as a Rajvanshi ex-serviceman in rural Kokrajhar put it at 10%), but even these, in all likelihood are labourers and labourers are no exploiters but an exploited lot. They need to be treated with dignity. All countries have legal and illegal migrants. USA has a very significant percentage of illegal Mexicans. But who engages them and benefits from their hard work?"- the business class, for cheap labour. USA is immensely more powerful than us but it could not force the Mexicans out. India has limited resources and can't afford to sustain work force from neighbouring countries, hence legal ways, commensurate with workers' dignity, must be employed to identify and deport them and to stop their migration (if at all there is any loop hole). As far as the language of Muslims in the area is concerned, there is strong historical reason for it. Kokrajhar district borders with West Bengal and Dhubri with Bangladesh. 100-150 years ago British tea planters brought labourers from Bengal where Muslims were a predominant landless work force. Thus they speak Bengali. One more observation. In 1971 India welcomed lakhs of Hindu-Muslim refugees as a part of strategy on Bangladesh. Many of them overstayed.

The current conflict developed as a chain event. Miscreants killed two Muslims on July 6. On July 19, a prominent Muslim suffered bullet injuries and a mob killed 4 Bodos, Subsequently sporadic killings of Muslims and display of fire power by Bodo elements, created a frightening atmosphere, forcing people to flee their homes. In Muslim dominated areas Bodos were made to flee. Once people fled, many of their homes were looted and put on fire. Most camps, having over 2.5 lakh Muslim refugees, are located in Dhubri district. This district with 80% Muslim population suffered no loss of life Bodos

from six villages had to flee to Kokrajhar.

Bodo insurgents have carried a long drawn violent struggle for separate Bodoland. In 2003 Center created BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts) giving substantial authority to Bodos (about 35 seats in the 40 member BTC Council). This created a wedge between them and other communities (Muslims, Santhals and Rajvanshis) who have a much larger share in population. Many insurgent groups surrendered their arms but some still have them. Disarming them is a major responsibility of the state.

All relief camps are facing severe hardships. The Muslim camps look even more dejected and worried, besides being poorer. On August 5 as I was sitting with people in a camp in Bilasipara when Roja Aftar time arrived, I noted that they had only one bucket of dates and biscuit packets for aftaar for 2000 people. On behalf of Sadbhav Mission I offered them 1000 rupees to purchase additional dates. Same was the scene in another camp. At night often there is load shedding for several hours and these camps plunge into darkness besides exposing them to mosquito bite. People cook their own food from the ration (rice, pulses and oil) provided by the government and vegetables provided by local support or NGOs. In most places people of all the communities are coming forward to extend support. Despite heavy odds people are at peace. I wish they had a creative engagement. They could be given some training or exposure in relevant trades. Students can be given tutorial sessions, game sessions or could go for jogging.

Mine was a short visit that began with my arrival in Guwahati at 7 AM. From the airport I took bus to train station. At 9:45 I took North East Express and got down at Kokrajhar at 1:20 PM. I walked through the city and then took a tempo to Kashipara (8 km away). I visited a Muslim camp and walked 3 km to visit two villages. At 8 PM I met the DC. By that time curfew had started hence I stayed in the circuit house in a awesome room for Rs. 130. Next morning (August 4) at 7 AM, I walked to Bodo camp Swrang M.E. High School. People were nice. Some got annoyed when I mentioned Nellie massacre. From there I took tempo, minibuss and bus to reach Dhubri by 12 noon. I walked to a relief camp and talked to people for one hour. This interaction was heartening. From there I went to Bholanath college. At 3:15 PM I met the DC and then left for Bilasipara. During 5 to 8:15 PM I visited 3 camps. Then took shelter in ABI hotel (for Rs. 250). It gave me the feeling of hardships faced by camp people as there was no light and mosquitoes were in abundance.

At 6 AM on August 5 I left for Kashipara and from there to Kokrajhar. I visited the Commerce College Bodo camp. People treated me with warmth and showed appreciation for peace efforts. At 12 noon I took Kamrup express to Guwahati. After reaching there I called some friends and left for the airport en route to Delhi.

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