

The Karbi Anglong Issue

Demand for urgent intervention to save innocent Karbi and Dimasa lives in Assam

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Stop this deadly farce of ceasefire

The present round of clashes had already been going on for nearly a month, but it took the horrifying 17 October killing of nearly 40 innocent people for New Delhi to take notice and pull up the State government. Even then the latter did little beyond taking routine administrative steps like imposition of curfew and deployment of the army. By that time, according to official estimates, more than 1000 houses were burned down in 43 villages in Karbi Anglong district, and a total of 77 people had lost their lives with hundreds more maimed. While both the Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) and the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) have engaged in arson and killings and both communities have suffered, mainly the Karbis are on the receiving end. Around 50,000 Karbi men, women and children have been crammed together in 49 refugee camps that are being maintained mainly by CPI (ML) cadres in the face of utter official apathy.

The scale of criminal callousness of the Indian state becomes all the more glaring when one remembers the backdrop to the recent bloodletting. This is the third such inter-tribal group clash in the region in 30 months since the April 2003 Dimasa-Hmar bloody conflict which was followed by Karbi-Kuki clashes, and yet, even after both the DHD and the UPDS openly declared war against each other in press conferences early this month, the State government remained a mute spectator. So did the joint monitoring group - comprising top officials from the State as well as central governments - that was set up precisely to keep a constant vigil and prevent such incidents.

But is it simply a case of failure on the part of the governments? Or is there a deliberate political design? The question arises because the armed outfits on collision course are not even semi-underground ones. Their leaders stay in known residences and meet ministers. Their armed cadres operate brick kilns and other businesses, move about in vehicles, go to banks and wherever they wish to and indulge in extortions with impunity, even though the ceasefire agreements stipulate that they must stay in the designated camps. They are allowed to move freely even during curfew hours, as the Assam governor saw for himself in a surprise visit to one of the camps very recently. This was a clear and impermissible violation of the ceasefire ground rules, he declared.

Not to allow such violation was and remains a necessity, but more is needed. There must be an immediate and thorough revision of the "ground rules", through democratic consultations, in the

light of nearly four years of experience that is far from satisfactory. Only one designated camp should be allowed for each outfit (not more, as at present) and that too only in the core area for the concerned tribe, i.e., the area exclusively or densely populated by them. This will help reduce mutual antagonism and chances of confrontation; and also make monitoring easier.

However, these are but urgent interim measures to be adopted during ceasefire, which by definition can only be a short-term arrangement pending a real long-term solution. Ceasefire, when stretched indefinitely, only invites more fire. What the people of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills really need is a time-bound plan for the fulfillment of their democratic aspirations and political demands. And the best way to ensure that is to honour the national commitment given to them way back in 1969 in the shape of Article 244A of the constitution, i.e., to constitute an autonomous State within the State of Assam.

But this, or any other political solution for that matter, is the last thing the rulers in Dispur and Delhi are prepared to concede. The ruling parties, having little foothold in the region, have been using the militant outfits from the very beginning for electoral gains and other political ends. They would continue to do so as long as they can. Worst of all, the State government has started raising the bogey of a 'red army' allegedly led by CPI (ML) leader and ex-MP Jayant Rongpi. This is a heinous attempt by a failed and discredited chief minister to pass off the blame to the party and the people's leader that have long symbolised the fraternal unity of Karbi, Dimasas and other tribes - a party and a leader that have been leading the mass movement for the attainment of their cherished aim of autonomous state in the most democratic, peaceful way. More, this is a nasty design to further destabilise the entire region to serve the vested interests. It is the bounden duty of all lovers of peace and democracy throughout the country to crush this conspiracy and stand by our bleeding brothers and sisters in this hour of man made crisis.

The Karbi Anglong Fact Sheet: A Story of Sinister Congress Game-plan and State Sponsored Killings

During last one month, since 26 September, Karbi Anglong has been transformed into the killing fields. These events of arson and killings are a direct outcome of a bigger Congress conspiracy, going on for a long time, of harbouring the armed outfits and sabotaging the popular democratic movements. Till now, nearly 100 have been killed, more than forty villages are razed to the ground, thousands injured and the number of persons living in temporary relief camps have gone up to 50 thousands. The number will definitely reach up to 75 thousands if one counts the number of displaced persons who are staying with their relatives in distant places.

The Assam unit of CPI(ML) called an all-party meeting (barring BJP and Congress) on 19 Oct. in Guwahati which was attended by CPI (national council member Pramod Gogoi and 2 others), CPI(M) (C C member and ex-State Secy. Hemen Das, CCM Nurul Huda and State Secy Udhav Barman), AGP(P) (ex-Chief Minister Prafulla Kr. Mahanta, ex-speaker Ganesh Kutum etc), SUCI (state leaders Chandralekha Das, Vimal Nandi and Ajit Acharya), UDF (Badruddin Azmal), UMF (Hafiz Rashid Chaudhary), RCPI (Ambu Bora) and RSP (Ratneshwar Gogoi). The meeting condemned the role of the Tarun Gogoi Government and opined that Chief Minister has no moral right to continue. The meeting also resolved to send an all-party team to visit the affected areas in Karbi Anglong on 22 Oct and to submit a memorandum to the Governor of Assam seeking his urgent intervention.

This Meeting also decided to support the statewide Bandh called on this issue independently by CPI(ML) and AGP(P) on 20 October demanding resignation of Tarun Gogoi. The bandh call received an overwhelming response and was a total success.

The sequence of events not only tells the story of utter failure and criminal negligence in tackling the situation but also a planned political conspiracy on the part of the Congress (I) government. The 9-Party team, as stated above, on their visit to the spot observed: "The State govt. is solely responsible for escalation of violence to the present magnitude". It also accused the Govt. of having "failed to perform its constitutional responsibilities".

The team of MLAs headed by Assam Assembly speaker Prithvi Majhi categorically dismissed the story of 'red army' and 'black widows' concocted by the Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi and Minister Hemant Biswa Sarma. It squarely blamed it on the DHD and the UPDS for the bloodshed. "The DHD's designated camp at Dhansari was the crux of the whole problem", a member of the team noted.(The Sentinel, 25-10-05)

And above all, "The Raj Bhavan sources said the involvement of G. C. Langthasa, Minister holding the portfolio of Hill areas, mines and minerals, animal husbandry and veterinary and PWD (Hills), in the carnage", was explicitly mentioned in the report (sent to Delhi by Assam Governor). Sources also said Langthasa is "under suspicion" for visiting Dima Halam Daoga (DHD) camps in Karbi Anglong "just before the violence escalated". "Official sources said the Governor's report, sent to President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil a couple of days ago, has clearly pointed at Dispur's lack of administrative will in handling the ethnic violence between Karbis and Dimasas." (The Telegraph, Oct. 25, 2005)

Going by the facts, one can see that present state of violence started on 26 September when a dead body of an autorikshaw driver belonging to Dimasa community was found at Rongkimi village near Tisom gaon. This ignited the DHD and UPDS rivalry that flared up into these heinous carnages. Both these outfits are not underground ones. They supposedly live in their designated camps with their arms and ammunition. But in effect, they roam freely in the entire region and also extort money by various means. There is a monitoring mechanism directly under the Union Home Ministry which 'monitors' their activities. Administration never tried to take any preventive step to defuse the situation in the sensitive localities in spite of repeated suggestions by local representatives and organisations. Timely deployment of forces in pockets having mixed population of Karbis and Dimasas could have prevented a number of cases of killing and arsoning. The district administration, with District Council dominated by the Congress, failed to provide food and shelter to thousands of displaced persons who fled to Diphu town between 8 and 11 October. It was only CPI(ML) with the help of general public and voluntary organisations that managed food, shelter, etc. for more than 10 thousand people during this period.

What has been the role of the Congress led governments in Delhi and Dispur? The Chief Minister issued a statement that 'such incidents does happen in forest areas' and New Delhi remained conspicuously silent even after the eye-opening report from the Governor. Why?

The 9-Party team also noted, "There was time gap of 6 days between Sept. 26 and Oct. 2 and another gap of 6 days between Oct. 2 and Oct. 8 when the district was incident free. But obvious tension was building up due to open challenge and counter challenge indulged in by UPDS-DHD. The Govt. did not take prompt action The Govt. could have immediately convene the meeting of cease-fire monitoring group" It further added that "since the core area of disturbances was confined basically to a relatively compact area in and around Diphu town up to Oct. 18, timely deployment of security forces could have easily prevented initial killings and burning of villages which subsequently triggered the cycle of violence and counter violence ...".

The Karbi and Dimasa communities living predominantly in the districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills in Assam have a long history of peaceful intermingling and shared existence. It is only during the last three years that social peace in the region has been vitiated by armed militant outfits

like the DHD and UPDS operating in tandem with the state. All through the 1990s, these two hill districts of Assam remained a unique zone of peace where people belong to the Karbi, Dimasa and a host of other communities fought unitedly and democratically, under a joint forum ASDC led by CPI(ML), to secure their constitutional claim for an Autonomous State under Article 244A. Successive central and state governments however only turned a deaf ear to this peaceful, democratic and just demand of the people, thereby encouraging armed insurgency in the region. The ongoing violence in this region is an engineered one and is a part of a much bigger conspiracy by the ruling Congress in Assam, and in the centre, to sabotage the democratic movement led by our Party in Karbi Anglong for narrow electoral gains. The way Assam government has acted during last few days when the violence spread unabated, it is our firm opinion that the one-member Commission constituted by the Assam Govt. to inquire into this spate of violence will not do the justice to the people. Instead, we demand to constitute an Inquiry Commission comprising of sitting judges, preferably from the Supreme Court, which should also investigate the role of the State government in Assam as well the role of the Monitoring Committee set up to monitor the cease-fire agreement with these warring outfits by the central government, to bring the truth before the nation.

Instead of offering a political solution to the people's long-standing aspiration for an autonomous state as promised under Article 244A of the Indian Constitution, the central and state government led by the Congress have only adopted a divided-and-rule policy issuing irresponsible statements and adopting dilatory tactics.

The role of the governments in Dispur and Delhi is not only conspicuous and inhumane against ethnic identities and national minorities but also is detrimental of democracy as well as national unity and integrity. The BJP and its allies are already out to fish in the troubled waters in this northeastern state of India , particularly in these twin districts. It is only the Left and democratic parties, organisations and personalities whose timely and effective interventions are the need of the hour to save the situation from escalating further.

We appeal to all concerned citizens/ organisations/ parties to send the letter to the President of India (as given below) by fax/post (Fax no. 011 - 23017290) and express your support and solidarity for suffering people of Karbi Anglong in Assam.

MEMORANDUM TO THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA

Date: _ _ _ _ _

Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam

Hon'ble President of India

Rashtrapati Bhawan

New Delhi

Sub: Demand for urgent intervention to save innocent Karbi and Dimasa lives in Assam .

Dear Sir,

During last one month, since 26 September, Karbi Anglong has been transformed into the killing fields. Till now, nearly 100 have been killed, more than forty villages are razed to the ground, thousands injured and the number of persons living in temporary relief camps have gone up to 50 thousands. The number will definitely reach up to 75 thousands if one counts the number of displaced persons who are staying with their relatives in distant places. Now reports of deaths of

people including children due to epidemic and neglect are coming from the refugee camps.

The sequence of events not only tells the story of utter failure and criminal negligence in tackling the situation but also a planned political conspiracy on the part of the government. The 9-Party team comprising of the leaders of CPI(ML), CPI, CPI(M), AGP(P), SUCI, UDF, UMF, RCPI and RSP, on their visit to the spot observed: "The State govt. is solely responsible for escalation of violence to the present magnitude". It also accused the Govt. of having "failed to perform its constitutional responsibilities".

The team of MLAs headed by Assam Assembly speaker Prithvi Majhi categorically dismissed the story of 'red army' and 'black widows' concocted by the Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi and Minister Hemant Biswa Sarma. It squarely blamed the DHD and the UPDS for the bloodshed. "The DHD's designated camp at Dhansari was the crux of the whole problem", a member of the team noted. (The Sentinel, 25-10-05)

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In view of the above, we strongly feel that you must intervene and take positive steps as follows:

1. Remove G. C. Langthasa from the Ministry and initiate legal proceedings against him for fomenting violence and abuse of power;
2. Ask Tarun Gogoi Govt. in Assam to step down;
3. Constitute an Inquiry Commission comprising of sitting judges, preferably from the Supreme Court, which should also investigate into the role of the State government in Assam as well the role of the Monitoring Committee set up to monitor the ceasefire agreement with these warring outfits by the central government, to bring the truth before the nation.
4. Stop the killings and save innocent Karbi and Dimasa lives.
5. Take Urgent steps to review and revamp the ceasefire mechanism and hasten the process of a political solution.
6. Immediately shift camps designated for the DHD from Karbi Anglong. Only one designated camp per militant group in their own respective areas be allowed and they not be allowed to move to other areas with arms, as is being done at present.
7. Rehabilitate all the affected and terrorised people on war-footing.

Yours truly,

Name:

Address:

Contact No.:

50-hour Hunger-strike begins at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi

CPI(ML) demands immediate intervention by the President to resolve the crisis in Karbi-Anglong and enquire into the conspiratorial role of the Congress Govt. in harbouring this ethnic strife.

Demands sacking of the Minister GC Langthasa and Step-down of the Tarun Gogoi Government.

The CPI (ML) started a 50-hour hunger strike cum dharna beginning on 1 PM of 25 October and ending on 3 PM of 27 October against the Tarun Gogoi Government of Assam and centre's UPA Government harbouring a political conspiracy leading to ethnic strife in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills of Assam . This is led by Polit Bureau Member Akhilendra Pratap Singh. He is accompanied by Central Committee member and Secretary of the Delhi State Committee of the Party Rajendra Pratholi and Delhi State Committee members VKS Gautam, Surendra Panchal and Ardhendu Roy.

Despite categorical findings of the political parties and various organisations in Assam and Assam Governor's note alleging the Tarun Gogoi Govt.'s conspicuous role and indictment of senior Dimasa Minister G.C. Langthasa who played an acitive role in fomenting trouble, the conspicuous silence and complete inaction of the Govt. at the centre is nothing but a clear pointer to the dangerous policy of the Congress rulers to bank upon ethnic strifes and abuse rules of Law and democracy. This is bound to adversely affect our national unity and integrity.

CPI(ML) is firmly committed to fight them out and strive for regaining Hill Districts people's fine tradition of unity and amity and strengthening the movement for their much aspired autonomous statehood. Through this hunger-strike the Party also seeks solidarity, co-operation and active support from all left and democratic forces countrywide.

P.S.

* From "ML Update", a CPI(ML) Weekly News Magazine, Vol. 8, n° 43, 25-31 OCT 2005.