

## Assam's new phase

I wish to refer to your second editorial of December 2, 1981, ('Assam's second phase') and to your second editorial of January 6, 1982 ('New phase in Assam').

For two years now, *Business Standard* and other newspapers in West Bengal have been all united in condemning the agitation in Assam although newspapers are fully aware of its cause. Clearly, this establishes the fact that West Bengal does not see eye to eye with Assam. Understandably, therefore, you will refuse to, and non-Assamese bureaucrat circles cannot or are not permitted to, appreciate the overwhelming Assamese emotion. There has not been a good word from the mouth of anybody in West Bengal on Assam.

The expressions you use—the "so-called foreigners' issue," "they have to see reason if they really wish well of the people of Assam," "Why should they not show rationality and wisdom"—are two year old slogans constantly hammered into the eardrums of the public. They are expressions used with an effort to be civil but, in fact, are debasingly obnoxious. Commending the police and CRP for their 'restraint' is a glaring example of the extent of fraudulence in the name of journalism.

The Assamese understand these and therefore will not listen to what you say or to those whom you impress by your sarcasm about the dead in Assam.

May I ask what contribution you have made towards solving the problem in Assam? You have no contribution; there has not been one helpful thing from West Bengal for the reason that in matters not to West Bengal whether the Assamese are buried in oblivion. Rather, that would be to West Bengal's advantage.

Since you nurse no feeling for the Assamese sentiment and the Centre's incapacity to free the Assamese from the pro-Pakistanism-Bangladeshis, the Assamese will not listen to you either. So the turmoil continues unabated in Assam. In Germany, efforts were made to eliminate the Jew. The gun can liquidate the Assamese today.

It is astounding how members of the intelligentsia like yourselves and the bureaucrats do not admit a naked truth. For Assam, it is better that the Assamese die than their men and women lose dignity in the years to come.

If it is thought fashionably that it is humbug for the Assamese to remain Assamese or the Hindu a Hindu, why not West Bengal lead the way and eliminate chauvinism? The leadership will be applauded by the country and the Centre will be grateful to West Bengal.

There is nothing in West Bengal today that has not changed hands except heredity, culture, speech

# Erosion of the plan

There is nothing that one can add by way of improvement to your excellent analysis of the Sixth Plan outlay ('Erosion of the plan,' B.S., January 2, 1982). But the analysis does invoke a few other questions vis-à-vis our planned economy.

Since the value of the rupee has shrunk to one fourth its value since the start of the five year plans, the present outlay of Rs. 97,000 crores amounts to no more than Rs. 25,000 crores in 1950 value terms, and it comes to only Rs. 5,000 crores a year or a meagre Rs. 7 only per Indian a year. This elementary calculation surely assures us of the marginal impact that the plan can have on people's lives? But the political party in power will certainly claim fulfilment of its duty to the nation, and therein lies the main utility of the plan.

We must also reckon with the fact that inflation is not unique to India. The legendary inflation in Italy makes ordinary citizens millionaires in terms of the lira. Yet that country is in much better shape economically than India is today. The difference is that in India we have shortages of every commodity, whereas in Italy there is abundant production of industrial as well as agricultural products. We, therefore, cannot avoid the hard though unpleasant conclusion that the philosophy of mixed economy is dragging India to the path of financial ruin. Socialism produces a pervading sense of irresponsibility at the citizen level—which is a dangerous portent by itself. In India right now about 30 million people are on the State's pay roll. They behave as ticks on a sacred cow (the socialist State apparatus). They consume all the revenue, giving very little in return. So the economic system is now something like a zero-energy reactor producing no power but satisfying as an experiment. In real terms this means that out of about 150 million working people 30 million are the best paid and work the least while controlling the commanding heights of the economy as well as all the administrative machinery. In real terms it also signifies that out of five working Indians, four work hard to produce some investable surplus which is gobbled up by the fifth privileged Indian, the tick on the holy cow.

If there is any doubt as to the truth of the premise of the non-effectiveness of socialism, one can look at the Soviet system itself. That system is in great economic difficulty as testified to by Mr. Brezhnev himself before the 26th congress of the CPSU. Its grain production is in ruins, while other industrial production has attained a plateau, resulting in a meagre 3 per cent growth that cannot offset the rapidly increasing defence outlay.

It is unpleasant to accept the bitter truth that the end result has been the demise of both our economy as well as the Constitution itself. The shrinking effectiveness of our Five Year Plans is but testimony to that nasty set of facts.

Calcutta

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and belief. West Bengal so clearly clings to these but does not want to admit the right of the Assamese to do so.

No one is secessionist among the Assamese as propagandists profess. I am not secessionist. I want to live as what I am with my right to speech and religion. I do not wish to live away from the country in a converted confederation which, I feel, is already in the air. If secession comes about, history will say that it was not the Assamese, but the 34-year-old Centre and West Bengal that caused it.

Calcutta

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