

# In The Footsteps Of Alien Rulers

By SATIS C. KAKATI

**T**HE idea of a sub-federation of the entire North-east region vanished with the establishment of Nagaland as a separate State on December 1, 1963. This development afterwards whetted the appetite of other tribal areas for equal status. Mr B. K. Nehru, who was the Governor of five States in the region, later said: "The tribals felt that if all the norms which were originally considered necessary for the establishment of a State—area, population and economic viability—could be thrown to the winds and a single district could be raised to the status of a full-fledged State, why they with a greater claim for that status should not be granted it."

However, the nebulous idea of a sub-federation having faded out, the Centre decided to set up a novel body called the North-eastern Council, very unlike the Zonal Councils, ostensibly to maintain some sort of unity, among the constituents of the NEC but really to direct and supervise from New Delhi the administration of the entire North-east region. The original draft Bill for the purpose sought to vest executive powers in the Council which was to be headed by a senior Central Minister.

## Protocol

While the Government of Assam and Nagaland suspected that the NEC was intended to be an apex agency over the State Ministries in the region and opposed the proposal tooth and nail, the Governor, Mr Nehru, strongly objected to a Central Minister being foisted as its chairman on grounds of protocol and effectiveness, though he welcomed the constitution of the Council. He insisted that the common Governor should head the NEC.

Finally, the Centre had to relent and set up the Council as an advisory body with the Governor of the North-eastern States as chairman. If the original draft Bill were to be accepted, the autonomous status of the five States would have been adversely affected. In the last 10 years since its inception, the NEC has proved its utility in taking up schemes to develop power, rail and road communication in the region, but the top-heaviness of the Council seems to have created difficulties.

Judging from the experience of the various measures undertaken by the Centre in respect to North-east India, it would be correct to say that essentially its approach to solve the problems has been political, as a result of which the region today stands fragmented into five tiny States and two Union Territories. Acceptance of the demands of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram for full Statehood is now only a matter of time. It would also not be possible for New Delhi to resist for long the demands for separate universities and High Courts put forward by the NEC constituents.

Manipur already has a separate university; Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram share the Central University at Shillong (North-Eastern Hill University) with campuses at Kohima and Aizawl for post-graduate classes, but Nagaland and Mizoram are not happy with this arrangement.

Arunachal Pradesh withdrew from Gauhati University a year ago and its colleges are affiliated as a stop-gap arrangement to Punjab University till a separate alma mater is established in Itanagar. In respect of High Courts, the one in Gauhati has been serving the region as a whole with Resident Benches in Shillong, Agartala, Kohima and Imphal, but how long this arrangement will continue is anybody's guess.

It appears that the Centre has not followed any imaginative policy different from that of the alien rulers who put emphasis on political rather than the economic aspects of North-east India. In doing so, the Centre has already paid a heavy price in terms of financial assistance to the unviable States and Union Territories, without paying much heed to other important considerations. If the accumulated agony of 20 million people, according to the 1971 Census, spread over a difficult terrain of 257,975 sq km and belonging to heterogeneous ethnic groups were to be removed, the Centre should have given top priority to the economic needs of the people such as harnessing the natural resources and solving the unemployment problem.

But instead of such an approach, the Centre embarked on a plan to balkanize the region as if there lay the panacea for the ills that afflict North-east India. This political prescription has proved worse than the disease. The fact that the Loktak project in Manipur and the construction of the 146 km broad gauge line between Bongaigaon and Gauhati have not been completed even after 10 years shows how tardily development work is executed in this part of the country. Of late, the Government of India has announced a number of schemes for utilization of natural resources like water, power, forests, and oil, but there is little guarantee that these are going to be implemented speedily.

## Shift In Policy

It is against this background that a shift in the Centre's policy to meet the requirements of North-east India is urgently required. Otherwise, efforts to solve the problems would prove fruitless. Indeed, neither the policy of drift nor the game of attrition would pay any dividends; the need of the hour is to prepare time-bound schemes with adequate Central funds and a task force to implement them. If the problems have persisted, it is because the region was deliberately kept isolated from the rest of India by a foreign re-

gime and, therefore, its integration with the other peoples of the nation has become difficult. But the task is not impossible. The geographical distance between the seat of the national Government and the North-east region is, to some extent, responsible for the present state of affairs in this frontier area, but this can be remedied by a new imaginative policy which takes into account the aspirations of the people.

(Concluded)

# Gogoi To Convene Statesman Assembly In Five Weeks

GAUHATI, Jan. 17.—The Assam Chief Minister, Mr Keshab Chandra Gogoi, said today that he was prepared for a trial of strength in the Assembly, which would be convened within next four to five weeks, report, PTI and UNI.

The Chief Minister told a Press conference here, prior to his departure for New Delhi, that the Governor had already told him to convene the Assembly within a maximum period of six weeks from the date of his assuming office on January 13.

Mr Gogoi said he had already asked the officials to start budget exercise and as soon as it was ready the date for a session of the Assembly would be announced.

Replying to a question, the Chief Minister declined to disclose the names of the legislators who supported his party to form the Ministry, saying that it would not be proper to disclose the names at present.

Earlier, he said he had the support of 63 members in a House of 118 and the Congress (I) Legislature Party's own strength was 41.

The Chief Minister, who will discuss with the Congress (I) High Command the formation of his Council of Ministers, said personally, he would prefer a "broad-based three-tier Cabinet" considering the need for representation of different interests including hill and plain tribes and tea garden labour. Immediately after his return from Delhi he would expand the Ministry Mr Gogoi added.

He renewed his appeal to the Assam movement leaders to call off their agitation, including the 12-hour "total non-cooperation".

About release of those, including student leaders, detained under the National Security Act and other acts, the Chief Minister said he had asked for relevant records to see that justice was done.

Meanwhile, Mr Dhruba Narayan Barua, former general secretary of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (I), today resigned from the primary membership of the party as "it is now in the tight grip of the reactionary forces".

In a letter addressed to the APCC(I) president, copy of which was released to the Press, Mr Barua said: "I am afraid with all your socialist protestations you cannot convert communal and

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chauvinist forces to tread the path of secularism and democracy for socialist goal"

In a resolution, the Assam PCC (I) today appealed to the people of the State not to observe the 2-hour "total non-cooperation" tomorrow and the "Assam curfew" agitation on January 26.

The committee expressed the confidence that the new Ministry would provide a strong and stable Government in the State and speedily implement developmental programmes.