

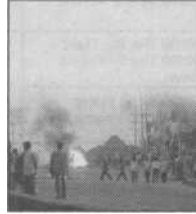
The Deccan Herald, Bangalore, 17 Aug 2007

## Violence again

The run-up to Independence Day in Assam has been particularly bloody. About 35 people, mainly Hindi-speaking migrants from other parts of India, have been slaughtered over the past fortnight. And on Independence Day, four bombs exploded in Assam's Dhubri and Bongaigaon districts. The explosions were a few hundred metres away from the venue of the parade. While no militant group has claimed responsibility, the killing of the migrants and the explosions are believed to be the work of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). In 2004, a blast on Independence Day at the parade ground in Dhemaji killed 13 people, mostly children. Since January, nearly 170 people have been killed, over 90 of them Hindi-speaking people mostly from Bihar who are settled in Assam for generations. These attacks have been found to be the work of the ULFA. The government has responded to the bloodshed in Assam with the same old tired steps. The Centre has sent a team headed by Union Minister of State for Home Sriprakash Jaiswal for consultations with the Assam government and senior security officials. More soldiers will be deployed and the usual "we will be tough with terrorists" rhetoric has been articulated.

The Centre's strategy towards the insurgency in Assam has involved a series of knee-jerk responses. These have not worked in the past and are unlikely to work now. India's northeast has been in flames for most of the past six decades since Independence. There is alienation and discontent among the people of the region and many people don't feel that their region is a part of India. Anger with Delhi runs deep. The region has not seen the kind of development which other parts of the country has witnessed. There is much disenchantment with terror outfits like ULFA but with India not addressing grievances, the people of the northeast feel distant from the rest of the country. This has to change.

The violence over the past fortnight in Assam shows that killing militants might stem the blood-letting for a month or so but not beyond. Military operations alone against ULFA and others will not work. Development and good governance should be provided so that people have a stake in being a part of India. Delhi has allowed the armed forces to determine its policy in the Northeast. Their input is welcome but it is the political leadership that should steer policy in Assam.



**The Assam policy should include good governance.**