

GORKHALAND AGITATION

FACTS AND ISSUES

Information Document II

JANUARY, 1987



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GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL

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CONTENTS

PREFACE	<i>Page</i> v
I The impact of the agitation on the social & economic life in the Hills	1
II GNLF organisation and agitations since September ..	..			..	..	5
III The Central Government and GNLF ..	..	..	..	..	..	16
IV The standpoint of the State Government	..		..	..	..	32
POST SCRIPT	..	..	..	..	..	36
Appendix						
Some economic aspects of the life in Darjeeling Hills	..		..	..	..	38

PREFACE

Last September the State Government had published an information document on the agitation for Gorkhaland, where all relevant information was put together along with a comprehensive account of the policy of the State Government on concerned issues. The present document is a sequel to the September document, and attempts to provide an up-to-date account of the developments in the Darjeeling Hills since September. This is by no means a substitute or an up-to-date version of the previous document, which should be studied by those who are interested in the basic issues and the attitude of the State Government towards those. In writing this present document we have assumed familiarity of the readers with the September document; hence, repetitions have been avoided as far as possible, except on some key issues which continue to be a matter of public debate, *e.g.* whether GNLF-led campaign is anti-national or not or whether the State Government's demand for regional autonomy for Darjeeling Hills is justified.

The present document begins with an assessment of the impact of this ten-month old agitation on the economic and social life in the Hills (Section I). This is followed by an account of the GNLF-movement, its various twists and turns and degeneration into one dominated by anti-social elements (Section II). In Section III the attitude of the Central Government towards the movement has been analysed. Section IV restates the position of the State Government on various issues. The postscript takes account of the developments since this document went to the press—particularly the two meetings between the Chief Minister of West Bengal and the Prime Minister on 8th and 14th January '87. In the appendix we are giving some more information on the economic aspects of the development in the Hills.

I. THE IMPACT OF THE AGITATION ON THE SOCIAL & ECONOMIC LIFE IN THE HILLS

We begin with a balance-sheet of the ten-month old GNLF-led agitation in the Darjeeling Hills since May, 1986, as it has affected the lives of the peace-loving ordinary men and women of the Darjeeling Hills themselves.

We had noted in the September document that the economy in the Hills is crucially dependent on three Ts—Tourism, Timber and Trade. As for Tourism, the number of tourists visiting the Hills has taken a nose dive. Whereas during 1985 (April to October) the total number of tourists was 1,32,000, the corresponding figures for 1986 (April to October) was 49,000, that is almost a third. This too is only a partial measure of the severe impact of the agitation on this important economic activity since it includes a large number of tourists who went to Darjeeling Hills during April and May, that is before the agitation was launched. During the October puja season Darjeeling town was virtually deserted, the extensive network of hotels, shops and restaurants remained empty, and the street traders, porters, transport workers, taxi drivers, pony-minders suffered a heavy loss of earnings, many of whom were reduced to the status of destitutes and beggars. More important, the long term plan of the State Government to further develop the tourist potential of this beautiful Himalayan resort has been torpedoed, and the millions spent in developing Mirik as a major tourist attraction has been wasted. There are reports of a larger than usual turnout of tourists in Shillong, Digha and other alternative tourist spots, which might further damage the future prospects of tourism in the Darjeeling Hills which earns around Rs. 25 crores in a normal year. The only way this industry can be revived in the future years is by bringing back peace and tranquility which characterised this area until the launching of this suicidal agitation.

The timber industry too has suffered a severe knock. Whereas in 1985-86 the total amount of round log extracted in Darjeeling and Kalimpong amounted to 41,629 cubic metres, it declined to 16,600 cubic metres in 1986-87 (up to November). Considering that a large number of people are dependent on this industry for their livelihood, and that it accounts for around Rs. 7 crores a year, this rapid decline in timber production is indicative of the severe disruption caused to the economy of the Hills by the agitation.

More ominous is the situation in the 72 tea gardens, which account for 50,000 regular workers and 30,000 irregular workers, and support a population of around 3,00,000-4,00,000;

apart from making a handsome contribution to the foreign exchange earnings of the country, from its yield valued at around Rs. 32 crores. Estimates made by the Darjeeling Tea Planters' Association show that nine days of work stoppage have cost the tea gardens about Rs. 5 crores in production loss; so far more than one million kilograms of tea production has been lost, accounting for more than one-tenth of the total production, while the workers have lost wages amounting to around Rs. 1 crore. This too is only a partial measure. Two of the tea gardens are under lockout largely because of the disturbances.

Supply of various materials to this industry has suffered from frequent bandhs, road blocks set up by GNLf activities and a deliberate attempt to deny food supply to tea garden workers who are unwilling to accept their directives. Fertiliser, pesticides, kerosene, gas and food ration, are not reaching the tea gardens in time, nor has it been possible to maintain normal banking activities which are so vital for the smooth operation of this industry. In several cases wage payments have been delayed, thus causing hardship to the workers. From late September the tea gardens have been the prime target of the GNLf activists who have repeatedly attacked the garden workers with weapons.

Similarly, many development activities in the rural areas and towns have virtually come to a standstill because of this agitation. In several places Government Officials are not in a position to freely move in the fields for extension work and for monitoring development activities. This has particularly harmed the animal husbandry programme in which Darjeeling Hills enjoy an advantageous position with by far the highest proportion of cross-breed cattle in the State and having the prospect of considerable progress with Himul Milk Co-operative as the focal point. Similarly, the transportation of ginger and orange, two of the major cash-earning products, to the plain has been seriously affected. Milk-produce, handling a perishable commodity, have suffered serious losses of daily earnings during bandhs etc. The potential beneficiaries of public works programmes such as NREP and RLEGS too have suffered from loss of daily earnings. Other programmes relating to crop protection, introduction of new crops and water-shed Planning have similarly suffered. Furthermore the organised campaign by GNLf against repayment of loans to Government and banking agencies has virtually ruled out the implementation of a wide variety of loan-subsidy supported economic programme.

The GNLf call for boycotting municipalities and panchayets has multiplied the injuries sustained by the Hill economy due to this agitation, since a majority of State-sponsored development programmes assume participation of elected local representatives in their implementation. In most cases these representatives are intimidated and coerced to resign; those not obliging receive threatening letters or are physically assaulted.

In his day to day life, the ordinary folk is subjected to all kinds of harassment or torture. Unruly GNLf activists move from house to house, shop to shop and car to car, collecting money for various GNLf funds. He is forced to purchase calendars, greetings cards and cassettes with speeches. In addition one has to obtain a GNLf receipt as guarantee for security and contribute to 'emergency' and other funds. Such money demand is continually on increase.

In some instances a section of the ordinary people, misled by GNLf propaganda, have acquiesced in their suffering with the belief that all this is temporary. There are others, whose number is growing everyday, who are not at all happy with this present atmosphere of violence and intimidation, but are too scared to articulate their feelings. There are also those who, by making their dissent known, have invited the wrath of the GNLf armed gangs, and have been subjected to various types of social repression including boycott and eviction from their homes.

In this situation various types of minorities are feeling threatened and insecure. Lepchas, the original inhabitants of the Hills, are additionally threatened by the racist attitude of GNLf whose President is on record as describing the tribals as "uncivilised, very backward, whose men go naked and whose women go bare-breasted" and, who need to be administered centrally, compared to the civilised Nepali-speaking population. The Lepcha associations are opposed to the idea of Gorkhaland where they would be put under the hegemony of the chauvinist aggressive GNLf. In a letter to the Chief Minister on 10th September they have opposed the formation of Gorkhaland, reiterating that they are the original inhabitants of the Darjeeling Hills.

Realising that its racist and aggressive attitude towards the Hill minorities is actually weakening its case for a separate State as a linguistic-ethnic minority within West Bengal, of late, the GNLf leadership has launched a campaign to show that in its contemplated Gorkhaland there would be no "domination or exploitation by the Indian Gorkhas over the other Himalayan ethnic groups", according to one of their pamphlets. In another pamphlet the protagonists of Gorkhaland have gone to the ludicrous extent of describing Lepchas, Oraos, Santals, Mechs, Bhojpuris, Mcdesias and Scheduled Caste Bengalis (mostly Rajbansis) that is practically every one living in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri excepting upper caste Bengalis as 'Gorkhas'. These attempts to lump all irrespective of their ethnic linguistic and other affiliations as 'Gorkhas' have failed to fool the minorities, who are increasingly feeling concerned about their fate as the Gorkhaland agitation is becoming more and more aggressive and violent. It is also important to note that the expression 'Gorkha' correctly applies to a small section of the Nepali-speaking population originally coming from one particular area of Nepal. Since a high proportion of Nepali-speaking

soldiers were recruited by the British during their colonial regime from that area, the latter wrongly termed all recruits from Nepal as 'Gorkhas'. Even today the Nepalis recruited by the British Government as soldiers are described as 'Gorkhas'. GNLF is now attempting to project the Nepali-speaking Indians as 'Gorkhas', as distinct from 'Nepalis' of Nepal; thus using a label wrongly given by the imperial rulers to all the Nepali-speaking people, and then further wrongly assuming that this would help to distinguish the Indian citizens of Nepali origin from the citizens of Nepal.

In this atmosphere of social oppression, violence, suppression of dissent and communal disharmony the only silver-lining is the valiant struggle of a large number of Nepali-speaking people who are courageously opposing this evil attempt to generate separatist, communal and divisive feelings at the risk of assault on their person and property. The resistance to separatist conspiracy is drawing inspiration from the mainstream of the Indian people, from ideals of national integration and communal harmony and from the long tradition of united struggle of the working people in the tea gardens irrespective of their linguistic, ethnic, religious, caste and other affiliations. No less important has been the role of the Left Front Government itself which, through its activities and programmes, has identified itself with the interests of the population in the Darjeeling Hills; and has consistently fought for the preservation of communal harmony and national unity. It is heartening to witness the valour and moral strength of those, no less Nepali-speaking than the protagonists of Gorkhaland, who are holding high the banner of national unity and communal amity, undeterred by the loss of 28 lives and the fact that more than four thousand of them have been rendered homeless. Their sacrifice and devotion to the country's interests, and their stubborn opposition to parochial, communal and rabble-rousing populism would always remain as a shining example to the rest of the Indians, particularly those living in areas torn by communal strife.

II. GNLF ORGANISATION AND AGITATIONS SINCE SEPTEMBER

We noted in the September document how the GNLF-led movement took an important turn from the second week of August. Until then the formal position of the organisation was to view its campaign as being against the Central Government which alone could concede the demand for Gorkhaland. The official letters etc., talked of the 'genocide' or 'apartheid' committed by the Indian Government, while the Government of West Bengal was repeatedly asked to keep itself out of the way as the main demands of the movement could not be constitutionally entertained at the State level. In fact, in late July GNLF called for a boycott of the Independence Day celebration and the hoisting of black flags on that day, to indicate its displeasure with the Central Government.

The important turn in the course of the movement came after the unannounced visit of Subhas Ghising to Delhi in the second week of August, where, according to claims from GNLF sources he met one prominent Congress (I) leader who pledged sympathetic consideration of the demand for separate Gorkhaland. They also advised Ghising against any precipitate action which might embarrass the Central Government and thereby make its task a difficult one. Following this, the boycott of the Independence Day celebration was called off and the agitation was postponed for one month. Since then the movement appears to be following a dual policy of appeasing the Central Government on the one hand and launching a brutal all-out attack on the democratic and secular forces opposed to the movement on the other.

In a memorandum sent by post to the Prime Minister of India on 14th August (which, however, did not reach, and another copy had to be sent in the middle of September) the claim for Gorkhaland was made in a tone which was qualitatively different from the one set by GNLF's letters to the King of Nepal and the United Nations, and the speech of Ghising which is being circulated by way of cassettes, all of which have been reproduced in the September document. In place of bitter allegations of 'apartheid', 'genocide', 'victimisation', or of the Gorkhas being left 'at the cross roads', the tone of the August 14 memorandum was of supplication to higher authorities for sympathetic consideration of its demands. It spoke of "the closer cultural and linguistic affinity of the Gorkhas" with the rest of India, and their sharing of "the joys and sorrows of India" and of a "common destiny". It strongly criticised those who label the movement as "secessionist" and categorically stated that "the

Indian Gorkhas do not wish for a separate sovereign State but a State within the Indian Union". However, the memorandum again referred to Darjeeling as the area "ceded . . . to the British Indian Government" by Nepal under the Treaty of Sugauli in 1815, a claim which is historically untenable, as demonstrated in our September document by quoting from official and authoritative sources. Darjeeling Hills were never a part of Nepal, but were transferred—by way of gift or through war by the Kings of Sikkim and Bhutan. Only the plains of Darjeeling (where the Nepali-speaking population now constitute less than eight per cent of the total) were forcibly taken over from Sikkim and ruled from 1788 to 1816 when the British army defeated Nepal and returned that territory to the King of Sikkim. The memorandum does not refer to the fact that the original inhabitants of the sparsely populated Darjeeling Hills were Lepchas, and both the Nepalis and the Bengalis came to the area in response to the demand generated by the British sponsored tea industry. In an attempt to please the Central Government the memorandum states that the "development schemes (under Hill Development Council) have been possible due to the availability of the Central fund; State's share, it is being strongly felt, being only on paper"—though the fact remains that out of Rs. 24.76 crores spent in the Hills for development in 1985-86 only Rs. 9 crores come from the Central sources. In any case, the radical change in the tone of the propaganda, and the protestations of Indianness indicate a sea change from the posture earlier adopted by GNLf.

This was followed by a letter to Buta Singh, Union Home Minister, dated September 15, 1986, where, in an apologetic tone, Ghising attempted to explain the circumstances which led GNLf to send letters to the King of Nepal and the United Nations. The letter to the King of Nepal was justified on the ground that the former was a signatory to the 1950 Treaty with India which enabled the nationals of both countries to enjoy rights of residence, work and trade in the other country. What was not explained was why the Prime Minister of India was bypassed (and given only a copy of that letter), when the Government of India alone could concede a separate State within India; and what the purpose was behind internationalising the issue if there was no secessionist motive. The letter to the United Nations was explained by GNLf as an act of "agony and frustration" because of non-response from Nepal and India (though it is not clear why Government of India would be expected to respond to a letter which was not addressed to it); and was further defended on the ground that other ethnic groups and organisations had in the past sent similar letters to the United Nations "on their grievances". The memorandum then made the important point that "we followed this well-known practice without realising that the CPI(M) and others opposed to us and our genuine demands would misinterpret our motives and use this to malign us and our movement". This was followed by a long tirade against the Government of West Bengal and CPI(M). The Memorandum affirmed its loyalty "to India which is our Bharat Mata" and regretted "any misapprehension or doubt caused by our sending the memorandum

to U.N., and some Governments". Finally, the letter sought an interview with Union Minister Buta Singh to discuss their grievances.

Minister Buta Singh replied to this letter on September 17, 1986, where he said: "Dear Sri Ghising, I am in receipt of your letter of September 15, 1986. It is well that you have sent it with a special messenger. I have still not received your letter of August 14, 1986.

I am glad—you have affirmed your 'total loyalty' to India and clarified that the GNLF seeks 'a redressal of its grievances through the framework of the Indian Constitution'.

As requested in your letter, I shall find time for an early meeting with you. I shall get back to you in a few days after fixing the date".

This correspondence between the two came to public knowledge after three weeks, when Ghising's letter was released to the Press by Asoke Sen, the Union Minister of Law on 8th October. Though admitting on October 7 that he had indeed replied to Ghising, Buta Singh made the claim that it was no more than a formal acknowledgement of the letter from GNLF. Apart from the impropriety of not bringing such communication to the knowledge of the State Government in time. This correspondence was also in direct contrast with the pledge given by the Central Government through Buta Singh in the Parliament on July 24 that "We will not do anything without the State Government", and that the Centre would have no direct dealings with GNLF. On that occasion the Minister went to the extent of asking the members "not to read too much in the newspapers" regarding rumours about such negotiations.

This letter of Ghising later formed the basis of the contention of the Central Government that GNLF is not anti-national, without taking into account the possibility that this might be no more than a tactical move. The very name of the movement suggests that it is seeking 'national liberation' from colonial domination. The reference in its documents to the principle of 'self-determination' for the colonially subjugated countries voiced by President Woodrow Wilson in 1919 further substantiates this point. In his cassette speech Ghising made reference to the possible membership of United Nations for Gorkhaland (which can only be accorded to independent countries), and justified his claim for a micro-state—despite its small population on the ground that there are other tiny countries which are independent and have been accepted as members of the United Nations. He added that "The UNO is recognising these countries as separate countries". Though his reference to China, Sicily and Ghana as small countries with U.N. membership illustrates the extent of his ignorance—Sicily being a part of Italy, China (if by that he means Taiwan) not being a member of the United Nations, and Ghana with a population of around one crore being many times bigger

than the Darjeeling Hills with a population of six lakhs—there can be no doubt that the scope of this movement is not limited to the demand for Statehood within India.

His historical references too, despite their gross inaccuracies, confirm his separatist orientation. References to 'vivisected Nepal', 'ceded territory' of Nepal, the 'unconfirmed status' of the Gorkhas because the treaties signed between Nepal and British India were not revoked at the time of independence, and the criticism of the British for not holding a 'plebiscite' to decide whether the area should be handed over to Nepal or India, along with the fact that the letter was written to the King of Nepal, clearly show that in the opinion of GNLF Darjeeling rightly belongs to Nepal, and should not have become a part of India.

Its criticism of the British government for "having decided only the fate and fortune of the Hindus and Muslims of Indian origin by creating separate independent countries of Bharat and Pakistan" while "the Gorkhas and their ceded land and territories were left at the crossroads", further confirms the ultimate objective of this movement despite its recent conversion to loyal citizenship of Bharat Mata. Nor should one forget the appeal made in their posters and leaflets, urging the Gorkha soldiers not to fight "for others" any more, to desert the Indian army and to take up arms to fight for Gorkhaland.

When in September, 1986 Rajiv Gandhi declared in Calcutta that West Bengal would not be divided, GNLF explained this to its followers as a 'political statement' in view of the coming elections, and not reflecting the real intention of the Central Government. It further made the point that the creation of Gorkhaland would not imply a division of West Bengal since Darjeeling, according to GNLF, was never a part of Bengal. In several meetings Ghising and other leaders of GNLF have mentioned that the creation of Gorkhaland would not create any constitutional difficulty, and that its supporters should wait for their leader to be invited to Delhi for talk.

At the same time, criticism of the West Bengal Government has been sharpened. In a document published by its Study Forum the intervention of the Central Government in Darjeeling Hills was sought. It sought the application of article 249 of the Indian Constitution to Darjeeling, and kept on harping on the theme that India's integrity was not safe as long as CPI(M) was in the leadership of the West Bengal State Government. To further appease the Indian Government and the Communist bogey was raised. The Central Government was reminded that it was not safe to have a Left Front Government so close to the Chinese border; and the point was made that an anti-communist Gorkhaland would help to keep off communist influence in the border area.

The aim of this type of propaganda among the Nepali-speaking population in Darjeeling

was clear to portray the Central Government as its friend, while at the same time labelling the State Government as its enemy.

This propoganda then went to the extent of describing a number of prominent Bengalis as 'antinationals', Rabindranath was described as 'antinational' on the ground that he wrote his song 'Janaganamana' allegedly to praise the British King, as a reward of which he was awarded Nobel Prize. Subhas Chandra was called an 'antinational' because he fought the British army in alliance with Japan and Hitler. Satyajit Ray was similarly labelled because he depicted Indian poverty in the pictures and thus projected a tarnished image of the country in foreign countries. It went on like this, labelling Shyamaprasad Mukherjee, M. N. Roy, Sushil Chatterjee (a founder of the communist movement in Darjeeling) and, as one would expect, Jyoti Basu, in turn as antinationals. Hiren Mukherjee, of all persons, was accused of raising the slogan "China's chairman is our chairman". It ended by stressing that Gorkhas were never antinational. Whatever be the inaccuracies, the objective of this pamphlet was clear to generate communal hatred against the Bengalis, and to mischievously depict the struggle in the Hills as one between the Bengalis and the Gorkhas.

Afterwards, when under pressure from the West Bengal Government, Union Minister Buta Singh declined to meet Ghising without his first meeting the Chief Minister of West Bengal, GNLF explained this to its supporters as no more than politiking and assured them that very soon Ghising would be summoned to Delhi. In fact, from late November for about a month Ghising's whereabouts were not known. It came to be known afterwards that a part of his time was actually spent in Delhi, trying to meet the Prime Minister and the Home Minister; the rest was given in meetings with Nepali-speaking population in Northern India.

On December 15, Ghising wrote a letter to Buta Singh, expressing his gratitude to him, the Prime Minister, Arjun Singh, and Asoke Sen "for rightly and fairly acknowledging that our movement is not antinational and that as Indians we seek a solution of our problems within the framework of the Indian Constitution", and then, respectfully, sought an appointment. It particularly stressed the case for the Indian citizenship of those Nepali-speaking people who had been living in India prior to the signing of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 21st July, 1950. Two long paragraphs of this brief letter were directed against the State Government for deploying CRP and BSF against the movement. The memorandum also made the claim that GNLF believed in "peaceful, democratic and constitutional methods" for achieving its goal.

In response to this letter a meeting took place between C.G., Somiah, Home Secretary and a delegation of four led by Ghising, on December 17. A copy of Ghising's letter to Buta Singh was sent to the Chief Minister of West Bengal, which reached after the departure of

the Prime Minister. Meanwhile, a press communique was issued by Ghising himself. True to his changed tone, Ghising "requested the Union Home Minister for early redressal of their grievances and sympathetic consideration of their demands", and "appealed to the Union Home Minister to look immediately into their basic demand that Gorkhas who have been living in India before Independence and prior to the signing of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950, should be clearly and unambiguously recognised and notified as Indian nationals". As one would expect, he then "complained to the Union Home Minister that the CPI(M) Government in West Bengal and their henchmen were virtually waging a war against the Gorkhas in Darjeeling and Dooars areas". He then 'pleaded for the Centre's protection' against the CRP and BSF being used by the State Government. Curiously, only after all these in four paragraphs, the fifth paragraph "also pressed for the creation of a new State of Gorkhaland within the Indian Union", and for the first time the economic issues were raised when the statement added, that "a separate State" would enable them to ensure speedy economic development of their area and also give them a clear Indian identity. He alleged that the area continued to be neglected and funds allotted for its development by the Planning Commission had been misused by the State Government."

However soon afterwards he withdrew the economic part of the argument by reverting to the point that his fight was for 'land'. Though distributed by Ghising, unlike the letters and statements produced by GNLF so far, this one was better drafted, and was cauched in a language which might give the impression that the Central Government was not a party to this dispute. It 'requested', and 'pleaded' to the latter and 'complained' against the State Government, and even sought 'the protection of the Centre', despite the formal position of the movement that it is directed against the Central Government which alone can grant its demand. If there was any doubt earlier, on this score this press communique clearly revealed the contrasting attitude of GNLF towards the two Governments—at the Centre and at the State level.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's decision to visit Darjeeling on December 20 was initially warmly greeted by GNLF leadership, which decided to take part in the meeting to be addressed by him and also to erect welcome arches all over Darjeeling. Though the welcome arches decorated with a green GNLF flag tied to Congress tricolour were erected for the Prime Minister, the GNLF leadership decided at the last moment not to take part in the meeting on the flimsy ground that CPI(M) might attempt to play some naughty game and then to put the blame on GNLF. Posters welcoming the "beloved Prime Minister" adroned the walls of Darjeeling, though the turnout was very poor, no more than a hundred or so excluding the plain-clothes policemen in the audience. Ghising later declared that had he returned from Delhi in time a proper reception could be organised for the Prime Minister. While it is not clear what factors influenced the decision of the leadership to stay away from the meeting

of the Prime Minister one possibility is that they themselves were unsure of the possible impact of Rajiv Gandhi's speech on their younger, unruly supporters.

Afterwards, referring to Rajiv Gandhi's speech, Ghising now put forward an ingenious argument to justify that letter—that it was meant to neutralise the possible opposition of the Government of Nepal to the creation of a separate State of Gorkhaland in the 'ceded territory'. He also emphasised again that, contrary to the point made by Rajiv Gandhi regarding the backwardness and neglect of the Hills as a major factor behind this movement, GNLF's fight was for land and land alone, and it had no economic dimension. However, there was no violent reaction against Rajiv Gandhi's announcement that West Bengal would not be divided and no new State would be formed. Possibly this was taken as no more than pre-election politicking to win votes in the plains. The Prime Minister's statement that those entering India from Nepal after 1950 would not be considered for citizenship simply echoed the demand made by GNLF earlier on this point. It is significant that GNLF has now declared the launching of an anti-Bengal agitation from January 23, 1987 which again confirms the contrasting attitude of GNLF towards the two Governments.

What all these show is that the Government at the Centre is taken by GNLF as a friend and as being sympathetic to its demand for a separate State despite its formal stand, while the State Government is treated as an enemy which is hostile to the creation of Gorkhaland. There is widespread expectation in GNLF that before the year 1987 ends the Government at the Centre would sign an accord favouring the creation of Gorkhaland.

This friendly view regarding the Central Government coexists with an aggressive policy towards CPI(M) and other leftwing parties, whose cadres have been subjected to murderous attacks, arson, wanton destruction of their property and large scale kidnapping. By the time the September document was released four members of CITU had lost their lives in GNLF attacks. Their prime target of attack were the tea gardens where the workers have a long tradition of democratic trade union movement. Whereas the successful strike of the tea garden workers on 11th September 1986 put the ranks of GNLF somewhat on the defensive. Their morale was boosted with the announcement of the Prime Minister himself in Calcutta in late September that GNLF is not antinational. While this statement was greeted with the bursting of crackers by the supporters of GNLF in the Hills, it was no accident that this was immediately followed by attacks on bustees in Tea Estates where the majority of the workers opposed Gorkhaland. In a single night more than 50 houses were gutted by fire. This was the beginning. Soon this campaign of arson spread to other areas and hundreds of homeless were chased out of their localities by GNLF supporters. So far 28 members of CITU, DYFI and CPI(M) have lost their lives and more than four thousand have been rendered homeless, two thousand having taken shelter in relief camps. Attacks are being organised repeatedly on Tea

Estates by mobs of 3,000 or more, who put road blocks to stop ration, medicine and other supplies for going into the gardens, do not permit the injured to be taken to hospitals, even squat in hospitals to prevent their political adversaries from being treated there or to be transferred to other hospitals. Boycotts have been organised against known CPI(M) activists, their offices have been ransacked and gutted, the CPI(M) office in Darjeeling has been put under seize. Attempt was made on the life of Ananda Pathak, Secretary of the CPI(M) district committee and an MP, his house was put on fire and the CPI(M) office in Darjeeling itself was dynamited. A number of political adversaries have been kidnapped, brutally murdered, with the dead bodies put in sacks and dumped in the valley. Those who switch their allegiance to GNLF are spared, but to test that their new affiliation is genuine they are coerced to lead the attack on the houses of other Left Front supporters. In this way attempts are being made to ruthlessly exterminate their only political opponents in the Hills; Congress(I) and Gorkha League organisations having ceased to exist.

The violent character of this movement should not come as surprise to those who have followed the course of its development since 10th August 1985 when 50 of its supporters, brandishing naked *khukri* took out a procession in Darjeeling town, following an oath-taking ceremony at the Mahakal temple. The supporters of GNLF created a sensation when they proudly displayed naked *khukri* when attending meetings addressed by Ghising in Kalimpong and Darjeeling in April and May 1986. In his speeches Ghising repeatedly talks about turning the water of the river Teesta red, and also refers to the washing of the blood-stained *khukri* in the water of the river Teesta by the soldiers of Nepal following a victory over the King of Magadh in the 12th century. A greetings card recently put on sale by GNLF for mobilising fund depicts a GNLF cadre holding a *khukri* in his hand while addressing a gathering. In short, naked, blood-stained *khukri* has come to symbolise the movement in the eyes of both its supporters and adversaries. Ghising is on record as saying that the Government of India only understands the language of force, and that he has 30,000 ex-servicemen under his command who are experienced in war and are familiar with the terrain; and has repeatedly threatened that if his demand is not conceded these ex-servicemen would be let loose. He has even added that the younger and more militant members of the GNLF are itching for a "do or die" type of struggle, and if Gorkhaland is not realised by 1987 the movement would take a serious turn. He has also threatened to drive out the Government Officials from the Hills and run an administration with the help of GNLF cadres. We have also noted in the September document how the GNLF activists attacked the police parties with *khukris*. In the Kalimpong incident in July 1986 one DIG of Police was stabbed, one CRP constable was killed, both hands of another was cut, while a deep wound was inflicted on the neck of a third, leaving the Police with no alternative but to resort to firing. Since then there have been several other instances of the GNLF cadres attacking BSF and CRP personnel and senior officials of the administration.

The brief history of this movement shows that it is intolerant of dissent and other political views and forces; it is bent on establishing its hegemony in the Hills, and to achieve its end is resorting to intimidation, kidnapping, large scale arson, destruction of property and ruthless brutal murder of its political adversaries. So far it has shown scant respect for 'peaceful, democratic and constitutional methods' in its functioning. During the declared 'anti-Bengal' movement it has sought to direct each house, workplace and office to erect green flags of GNLF from the top, and has warned that those not following this dictat would be severely punished. It has reiterated that no other political party will be permitted to function in the Hills or to place demands on behalf of the people of the Hills to higher authorities.

Given the difficulties of the terrain and of communication, the time taken to inform the Police authorities and then to obtain their support can be several hours. In this situation those subjected to mass attacks by GNLF supporters with arms are often left with no option other than either to meekly submit or to organise their own self-defence. By no stretch of logic or imagination can this morally and legally valid act of self-defence, be equated with planned murderous assaults by GNLF supporters. To equate the two would amount to treating on the same footing both the offender and the victim compelled to take recourse to self-defence.

It is equally wrong to view this conflict in purely party political terms as between GNLF and CPI(M) when a proper approach should be to see this as one between the forces of separatism, and disintegration and those supporting the ideals of national integration and communal harmony. Some misinformed Press reports often depict this as a conflict between the Bengalis and Gorkhas, not realising that those who are dying in confrontations with the marauding GNLF gangs are also Nepali-speaking, and, we would add, are without doubt more authentic representatives of the true traditions in the Hills.

In recent months two important trends are observable in the functioning of GNLF. First, the movement is increasingly coming under the control of the local anti-social elements, which are using it as an umbrella for settling old scores, for conducting various nefarious activities or for extracting monetary and other benefits by intimidating innocent victims. This is leading to the second development—growing factional conflicts within the organisation often centering round the issue of control over fund collected in various forms. B. B. Gurung, one of the Vice-Presidents of the organisation was among the first to voice concern in late August about its functioning, particularly non-submission of accounts by Bharat Dong and Lapka Dong and extravagant use of funds by officials without proper authorisation and consultation. On 18th October Bharat Dong himself declared the dissolution of the Darjeeling Town Committee of its youth wing alleging that it was being controlled by rowdies and thugs who were terrorising the businessmen to extort money from them. On 5th November Ghising asked the members of the town committee to meet him, where he asked them to drop

some of the committee members, but it was reported that they defied him with the support of Lepka Dong. On 8th November the matter came to a head when Bharat Dong asked members of the committee to produce accounts, which they did but showed that only Rs. 4,000 had been collected. This appeared to be unconvincing to Bharat Dong who alleged malpractice on their part; which led to heated altercations between them and eventually Bharat Dong and his men chased them away from his house. The latter regrouped after sometime and returned in large number for a show down, which was eventually avoided by the intervention of others.

In a meeting of GNLF held in the first week of November, Bharat Dong, as the person in charge of Emergency and Security Fund, gave account of Rs. 3,12,748 collected, and showed a balance of Rs. 8,544 in hand. He then challenged Ghising to produce account of Rs. five lakhs collected by him, while Ghising in his turn was unconvinced that the balance in hand with Bharat Dong could be so small. In another incident, Sukhon Subba was removed from the post of treasurer of GNLF at Takdah Tea Estate because his integrity was suspect; his men thereupon retaliated by ransacking the house of his successor, Padam Bahadur, and severely wounding him with a spear. In another incident C. K. Pradhan, convenor of Kalimpong GNLF was shot at in a meeting by Dilip Triparthi and Kedar Muslim following allegations of misappropriation of funds by the former; as a sequel to which Kedar Muslim himself was murdered in Kalimpong Hospital. Factional conflicts are acute, particularly among the youth and women sections.

It is reported that Lakpa Dong, a prosperous property owner in Darjeeling, is leading the faction which is seeking a more militant programme. Lakpa Dong has openly defied Ghising by telling the reporters that Ghising is not interested in fighting, is more keen to curry the favour of Delhi and to earn publicity for himself. What all these show is that GNLF is far from a stable organisation with a united leadership which is motivated by a cause. On the contrary, lured by money and power that belonging to this organisation can fetch, a large army of unruly activists, many of them known anti-socials, are controlling the organisation at various levels. These elements, solely concerned with their own personal gain and using the movement as an umbrella are terrorising common people and also fighting against one another, thereby severely disrupting life in the Hills. This is particularly noticed in their frequent declaration of bandhs, setting up of road blocks and other programmes. In November, while one faction declared the closure of educational institutions, another declared that school examinations and classes should not be disrupted. Several bandhs have been declared by one group while being opposed by others, thereby leading to a confusing situation. When G. S. Mokhtan one of the General Secretaries of GNLF declared in a poster that no strike etc. would be valid without his authorisation, this brought a sharp reaction in another poster which asked, "Who is Mokhtan to give order"?

Anarchy and disorder prevail in this organisation, which is inducing many erstwhile supporters of the movement to have second thoughts. Popular enthusiasm for its demands is waning as the antisocials are increasingly coming to the fore.

One particularly alarming feature of the movement is the effort its leaders are making, including Ghising himself, to spread discontent among the 15 lakhs or so Nepali-speaking people living in India at present outside the Darjeeling Hills. Though their actual number is only a quarter of the figure of 60 lakhs being propagated by GNLF, they are spread over the whole country and constitute a valuable segment of the Indian army with a long tradition of many heroic battles. Indians everywhere are justifiably proud of these fighting men, as they themselves are proud of their role as soldiers. The mischievous campaign among them, asking the "how long you will fight for others", and then urging them to "quit the army at once" and to fight their own battle for Gorkhaland, aims at demoralising these armed personnel and creating disaffection amongst them. The sinister implications of this campaign among the Nepali-speaking Indian soldiers should be taken into account while assessing this movement.

III. THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND GNLF

In the September document, after discussing the dangerous implications of this separatist movement for Gorkhaland, we strongly made the point that "any equivocation of dodging of the main issues at any level would actually encourage the leaders of Gorkhaland agitation to continue with their campaign". We also pointed to the reported statement of Ghising in August 1986, that "Government of India understands only the language of agitation. Any one who agitates with sufficient force secures his demands. Look at Assam, Mizoram". Keeping this in mind we warned against irresponsible, misinformed public statements from central ministers or national leaders of major political parties which might give the impression that they are sympathetic to the movement or consider their demands to be justified. We knew that any sign of weakness, duplicity or double talking on their part would be seized with both hands by the GNLF leadership to enhance their credibility among the unknowing masses in the Hills. In our September document we spoke of the need for national unity in order to face this separatist menace, and avoided issues which might be interpreted as serving party-political ends. We lauded the all-party unity achieved in Calcutta on this issue, and the favourable impact on the Nepali-speaking masses of the joint statement of 26 political leaders of all parties which categorically declared this movement as 'antinational' and 'secessionist'. We hoped that, rising above narrow electoral interests, at least the parties with national standing would join hands on this issue. The signing of a joint statement by leaders of the Left Front and Congress (I) on this issue was viewed by many as an event with extraordinary significance.

Since then a great deal of muck has flown down the rivers Ganga and Teesta. To our dismay, this agitation has indeed become a party-political issue. For this the responsibility lies fairly and squarely on the Central Government, as the following account would illustrate.

To begin at the very beginning, immediately after the launching of this agitation, whereas the Central Government appeared to be concerned with the agitation the position of the West Bengal unit of the Congress (I) leadership was far from clear. When Jyoti Basu met Rajiv Gandhi in early June, the latter agreed that Gorkhaland agitation was a national problem and the Centre would give all necessary help to the State Government to handle the agitation. When Jyoti Basu alleged that the State Congress (I)'s attitude was far from positive on this issue, the Prime Minister assured him that this would now change.

In fact the attitude of the State Congress (I) did change after that, and its leadership pledged its support to the State Government on this issue despite its differences over others. Apart from the joint statement, which Priyaranjan Das Munshi signed on behalf of Congress (I) on 18th August, the State Congress (I) had tabled a motion for discussion in the State Assembly which sternly condemned the movement as antinational. Das Munshi alleged, after touring Darjeeling, that goondas were being brought over by GNLF from areas of Nepal across the border to attend the meetings addressed by Ghising. Dawa Narbulla, head of Congress (I) unit in Darjeeling, was dropped from the position he was holding at the state and district levels for his deviant position in support of a centrally administered territory in Darjeeling. Up to this point all the major parties expressed equal concern and unequivocally condemned GNLF more or less in the same language. There was, therefore, no question of this separatist demand becoming a major issue of dispute in the forthcoming State Assembly election, as long as this political consensus was maintained. As it turned out, this consensus lasted for one month and two days, to be exact.

From the beginning the State Government made it clear that as far as the 'law and order issues' are concerned these are solely the responsibility of the State Government, though the latter would expect help from the Central Police Forces. However, the State Government did not view this as merely a law and order problem since the agitation raised a number of political issues which seemed to be making impact on a large section of the Nepali-speaking population. While the State Government and the parties in the Left Front were prepared to do whatever was possible to fight those issues on the political plane among the people in the Hills, the former expected the Central Government to make two categorical statements to facilitate their campaign among the masses: (a) that the movement is antinational and secessionist, and (b) that the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950 does not in any way prejudicially affect the interests of the Nepali-speaking Indian citizens. There was optimism in the State Government circles—based on the dealings with the Central Government until then—that such statements would be readily forthcoming, which would greatly undermine whatever was the political basis of the movement and dispel any doubts as regards the attitude of the Central Government on this. This was also expected to scotch the rumour that the Central Government was intending to make a deal with the separatists bypassing the State Government.

However, the statements made by the Prime Minister and P. Chidambaram, Minister of State of Home Affairs, on the floor of the Parliament on 13th August, 1986, while helping to clarify the second point, was equivocal on the first one. The Government of India, while condemning in general terms "every antinational movement" refused to categorically describe GNLF movement as 'antinational'. We have already noted that this

sitting of the Parliament took place immediately after Ghising's first visit to Delhi and followed by statements from Arjun Singh, Vice-President of Congress (I), that this movement could not be described as 'antinational' since they were seeking statehood within India. This statement of Arjun Singh was widely publicised by GNLF in the Hills to create the impression that the Central Government was on its side. The fact that none of the Central ministers had any word of condemnation for the agitation did not go unnoticed.

However, in the same session of the Parliament the Prime Minister also declared that "I have assured the Chief Minister that we will give him full support. I have full confidence in the competence of the West Bengal Government to deal with the situation". Earlier (24.7.86) Buta Singh, Home Minister, had declared that "We will not do anything without the State Government" and that the Central Government would not directly deal with the advocates of Gorkhaland. At that point the position of the Central Government appeared to be that it was a purely law and order problem, and entirely a matter for the State Government to handle, while the State Government pointed to the range of political issues—such as the issue of statehood, Indo-Nepal Treaty and the historical basis of the claim regarding 'ceded territories',—which could only be clinched at the national level. It was also pointed out that Ghising himself did not consider State Government a party to the dispute and has no intention of negotiating with it, since the demands of GNLF could only be conceded by the Government at the Centre.

The position of the Central Government took a decisive turn in the third week of September when the Prime Minister, while visiting Calcutta, made a number of important statements on this agitation. The main points of his statement, as widely reported in the Press, were as follows:

- (a) This was a movement of the Nepalis who were demanding Indian citizenship;
- (b) That they were not demanding a separate state; if they had been doing so he was not aware of it;
- (c) Having read the documents relating to the movement he was convinced that it could not be described as 'antinational';
- (d) This movement was entirely a matter for the State Government to handle, and the Central Government had nothing to do with it;
- (e) However, he was opposed to the division of West Bengal, or even to regional

autonomy for the Hills; and it was up to the Government of West Bengal to find a way out within the framework of the Indian Constitution.

Apart from showing that the Prime Minister was totally misinformed regarding the movement, it also shows how the highest authority in the country can be easily misled to adopt a particular public position, without a thorough examination of the facts and issues at stake. Our clarifications on those points are given below:

- (a) The letter of GNLF to the King of Nepal, and the cassette speech of Ghising and other documents and statements quoted in our September document clearly show that the declared position of GNLF is just the opposite of what the Prime Minister is claiming it to be. GNLF's case is that the Indian citizens of Nepali origin do not wish to be confused with the Nepalis who reside and work in India under the 1950 Treaty between India and Nepal; and their demand for Gorkhaland is based on the belief that a separate State for them would help them to clearly demarcate themselves from the Nepali citizens. We have already noted in the September document that this is far from the case. If the existence of a State with a Nepali-speaking majority would help to demarcate the Indian citizens of Nepali origin from the citizens of Nepal, we may point out that such a State already exists, that is Sikkim. Moreover, there is no way that the Nepali citizens can be stopped from going to Darjeeling Hills as elsewhere, irrespective of whether or not a separate State of Gorkhaland is created, as long as the present arrangement between the two countries holds. Furthermore, the argument that the reciprocal arrangement between Nepal and India based on the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950, which permits citizens of one country to live, work and trade in the other, adversely affects the Indian citizens of Nepali origin has not been illustrated by GNLF with reference to a single concrete case; apart from the fact that this treaty which is to the advantage of both of the countries applies equally to all the Indians, and not to the Nepali-speaking Indians alone. It may also be pointed out that such reciprocal arrangements are quite common among friendly countries in other parts of the world, e.g. among Benelux and Scandinavian countries or among the members of EEC, to cite a few examples. It is unfortunate that GNLF has used the innocuous provisions of the treaty to play on the hypothetical fear of a large number of Nepali-speaking people; but the point to make here is that the Prime Minister seemed to be unaware of all these issues.

- (b) The statement that the movement is not demanding a separate State is even more astounding. The question then arises: what the movement is fighting for

if not for a separate State? Ghising has repeatedly stated that his fight is for 'land', and he would achieve a separate State for the Gorkhas by 1987. Their posters 'Welcome to Gorkhaland' can be seen everywhere in Darjeeling Hills. In fact creation of a separate State is the only demand of the movement; and Ghising is on record as saying that if this is conceded the other demand regarding the scrapping of clause 7 of the 1950 might be dropped.

- (c) While the Prime Minister has said that having read the relevant documents he is not convinced that the movement is 'antinational', the editorials in practically all the national dailies have found our September document depicting the movement as antinational, convincing. It is not enough for the Prime Minister simply to say that he is not convinced, without clearly specifying why he is not convinced by referring to the precise points raised in the September document. Several members of Parliament, including some belonging to Congress (I), urged the Central Government to publish its own document on the agitation, giving facts and arguments in favour of its position; but this proposal found no favour with the Government at Delhi. Given this, it is hard for the State Government to know what else it can do to convince the Central Government regarding the antinational character of this movement. Further even assuming for the sake of argument that there is an honest difference of opinion between the two Governments on this particular issue one wonders why the Central Government has failed to criticise GNLF for its compaign of violence or for writing to the United Nations and various countries (for which Ghising himself later regretted).
- (d) The contention that the Central Government has nothing to do with the movement would be untenable in the face of the issues raised by GNLF which can only be clarified at the national level. The State Government has never sought any help of the Central Government for maintaining law and order, excepting in terms of help with armed personnel. It has asked only for political support, to help with the propaganda of the State Government among the Nepali-speaking masses and to combat the misleading campaign of GNLF based on non-issues but playing on the fear and sense of insecurity of the minorities.
- (e) The Prime Minister's categorical rejection of the demand for Gorkhaland was helpful, but, combined with his refusal to describe the movement as antinational and to condemn GNLF and its campaign of violence, it has failed to make the desired impact on the Nepali speaking masses. The GNLF supporters have been given the impression that the Prime Minister is on their side, that with the forthcoming

State Assembly poll in mind he had to say something like this, and that Ghising would soon be invited to Delhi for consultation. Rather than GNLF and the Central Government being the two main adversaries, the conflict is now seen as one between the Left Front and the GNLF with the Central Government sitting in the middle as the referee. We have already noted that since this speech the violent attack on the tea garden workers and political adverseries has been stepped up, while the tone of GNLF correspondence with the Central Government has become distinctly respectful. Its subsequent demand for Central intervention in the administration of Darjeeling Hills shows its growing trust on the Central Government, despite its formal position that the movement is against the Central Government which alone can redress its grievances. Furthermore, the Prime Minister's advise to the State Government to find a solution makes little sense when all the options to the present constitutional set up, including the establishment of regional autonomy, have been ruled out by him.

While the Prime Minister is not convinced about the 'antinational' character of the GNLF-led movement, most of the national dailies have taken his statements as having been guided by purely party-political considerations, as the following selection of editorials published immediately after his visit to Calcutta would reveal.

In its editorial captioned "Mischief or Naivete", Statesman commented: "His assurance that West Bengal will not be partitioned was more than offset by the accusation that the Left Front regime condones infiltration and by the even more reprehensible suggestion that the authorities in Calcutta are somehow pushing a still innocent GNLF into making exorbitant demands. If the Prime Minister really believes the latter, it can only mean that he has not been briefed on any of the GNLF's documents and utterances and that he has no idea of the evidence marshalled in the State Government's white paper." Then it continued, "A more probable—though even less happy—explanation could be that Mr. Gandhi is unable to resist the temptation of playing party-politics even on so serious a matter. . . . His extraordinary contention that the GNLF has not demanded a separate Gorkhaland and his other equally ill-informed comments on the movement appear to condone the agitation and squarely lay the blame on the Left Front. Clearly, the Congress (I) Vice-President's politicking has prevailed over the more realistic counsels of the WBPCC (I), but whatever short term gains can be expected from such casuistry, the naivete Mr. Gandhi has also displayed can only further incite ethnic unrest not just in West Bengal but all over the country."

Indian Express, in its editorial captioned "Playing politics ?" (23.9.86) stated: "It is difficult to see any justification for Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's recent statement in West Bengal

that the Gorkha National Liberation Front's movement for a separate Gorkhaland is not antinational or secessionist. Mr. Subhas Ghising, GNLF leader, has no doubt stated that he wants Gorkhaland as a State within India. But he has also said and done other things which suggest that his aim is separation and independence. That Mr. Gandhi overlooked such evidence is surprising. Even if he had reason to doubt it, he should have avoided rushing to issue a certificate to the GNLF." It continued "The impression conveyed by his statement that the aim of Gorkhaland agitation was to get Indian citizenship for a section of Nepali citizens living in India, is either that the Prime Minister is unaware of even the basic facts about the GNLF movement or that he is deliberately playing politics to embarrass the Left Front government. It could be both. Either way, these statements have caused confusion and conceivably could undermine efforts to deal with what may emerge one day as a major threat to the country's integrity."

Hindustan Times, in its editorial "Matter to Ponder" (25.9.86) stated: "It is possible that the Congress (I) high command has diagnosed the Gorkhaland agitation as the West Bengal Left Front's Achilles' heel. This may or may not be a right conclusion. Perhaps the Congress (I) feels that the Left Front would make a mess of its following over the Gorkhaland issue, and suffer at the hustings, possibly in February. But is the party leadership certain that the agitation led by Subhas Ghising's Gorkhaland National Liberation Front would not grow into a dragon whose appetite would remain unwhetted after devouring the Left Front? There are some disturbing signs which suggest that there is more to the GNLF agitation that meets the eye (not to speak of the mystery that funds appear no constraint for GNLF)." It then asked the question: "But what is not clear is: How does the demand of Nepali citizens for amending the Indo-Nepal Treaty become the charge of a State Government?" It also noted "Centre's refusal to condemn the Gorkhaland agitation, or even to express strong displeasure at it."

Times of India, in its editorial "Getting It Wrong" (dated 22.9.86), referring to Prime Minister's speech in Calcutta said: "What he is saying is that the GNLF's agitation is only for citizenship rights, not for a separate State. Nobody would be more surprised to hear this than Mr. Ghising himself. Mr. Gandhi's own Congress Party unit in West Bengal is in no doubt that what the GNLF wants is a separate State carved out of some areas of West Bengal. Fortunately, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi was emphatic that there would be no division of West Bengal even by "one millimetre" in order to give Darjeeling district regional autonomy. While such a categorical rejection of the GNLF demand was long overdue, the Prime Minister can only confuse his party, and, more importantly, the country at large by rendering that more innocuous that it is. If his own confusion is due to his being inadequately briefed by those we ought to know better, then it is vital that he learns the facts immediately."

Newstime (24.9.86) in its editorial "Boosting Separatism" advised that "Till Mr. Gandhi gets the necessary grounding it may not be unwise if he desisted from pronouncing on issues like the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF). Mr. Gandhi would have us believe that the GNLF is not antinational because its demand is limited to citizenship rights for the Nepalese in India. He is not inclined to believe that they are asking for a separate State and even less is he prepared to face the fact that the demand for statehood within India is a later modification adopted by the GNLF. That the GNLF had been earlier pressing for a separate State outside the framework of India could not be unknown to Mr. Gandhi. Yet he has found it opportune to give a clean chit to the GNLF raising a host of suspicions about his motives."

The Telegraph (30.10.86) while, not challenging the political integrity of the Prime Minister, and welcomed his statement that Bengal would not be divided, commented, referring to his point that GNLF is not antinational. "The manner in which that statement of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi has been exploited by the GNLF and other sectarian and even clearly secessionist forces wandering across our nation should make the Prime Minister pause and reconsider whether he did not take too technical a position on the subject. Mischievous elements are using this statement to justify their own ambitions and to spread the notion that this is the right time to challenge Delhi."

In its editorial, "Gorkhaland is clearly not on" Hindu (10.10.86) commented: "The very name, the Gorkha National Liberation Front is pregnant with meaning in relation to the vital question of the nation's unity. 'National liberation', as a slogan, does not merely imply the creation of an independent, separate State: it makes the goal explicit..... A tactical retreat from this secessionist position and pitching the main political demand at another level (now suggesting that 'all' the GNLF wants is a full-fledged State within the Indian Union) does not at all settle the question of credentials and goodwill. Moreover, secessionism in a formal sense is not the sole criterion of antinationalism: internally divisive activity aimed at weakening the democratic unity of India cannot certainly pass the test of patriotism..... If a political dialogue is possible at all with Mr. Subhas Ghising, the three conditions stipulated by the West Bengal Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, seem very important."

What all these editorials indicate is that (a) whereas the Prime Minister is simply 'not convinced' that GNLF is 'antinational', there is a large area of agreement in the country that the GNLF-led movement is indeed antinational; (b) that its present formal declaration of allegiance to India is probably no more than a tactical move; (c) that it was wrong on his part to give GNLF a clean chit when its activities were condemnable on other counts too; (d) that the Central Government was not properly briefed on this issue, and as a

consequence some of his statements made no sense and were factually wrong; and (e) that, he was politically motivated in making those statements. These comments from practically all the leading dailies of the country should convince any one that it was the Central Government which unnecessarily made it a party-political issue, whereas until these spate of statements during his two September visits to West Bengal, the major political parties in the country and in West Bengal seemed to be on agreement on this issue. These editorials and other comments made it clear that GNLf commitment of patriotism should not be taken seriously.

Apart from adding fillip to the sagging morale of the GNLf supporters following the successful strike of the tea workers on 13th September in the Darjeeling Hills despite GNLf opposition, these statements of the Prime Minister have undermined the state level all-party unity on this issue. The State Congress (I) leadership, highly confused by these statements from their highest leadership, was for a time at a loss to decide its future course of action. It seemed at one stage that the State Congress (I) leadership was given the option to follow its own independent course based on its own judgement, despite the declaration of the Prime Minister. Das Munshi, State Congress (I) President, sought to explain this apparant inconsistency by making a distinction between the role of the Prime Minister as the head of the country's administration and of Congress (I) as a political party. Dawa Narbulla, Congress (I) leader, in Darjeeling, was however jubilant at the refusal of the Prime Minister to label GNLf as 'antinational', as if he was representing that party too, and demanded punishment of those Congress (I) leaders who were not toeing the 'line'. He even went to the extent of saying that the CPI(M) claim of confronting GNLf was a lie, the former were nowhere in the picture, and whatever confrontation was taking place was that between the Police and GNLf, apparently this argument was meant to counter the criticism that Congress (I) had surrendered itself to GNLf in the Hills while CPI(M) cadres alone were fighting the separatist menace. Similar statements were made by several other prominent Congress (I) leaders, who were unwilling to give CPI(M) the credit of surviving the GNLf onslaught and risking lives to ward off this danger.

The confusion continued for weeks. One witnessed the unusual spectacle of Congress (I) leaders frantically attempting to withdraw their resolutions on GNLf movement placed before the State Assembly, while the Left Front majority voting its approval for it on 30th September, 1986. This Congress (I) resolution stated that this separatist movement was undermining national unity and integrity and was torturing the ordinary masses, though, at the time of passing this resolution the formal position of State Congress (I) had taken a 180° turn.

Some Congress (I) leaders have found nothing wrong in GNLf writing to 'their

King' in Nepal; forgetting that in that case their affirmation of loyalty to Bharat Mata cannot be taken seriously by the Government of India. While they were thus making a rather clumsy effort to defend the decision of GNLF to write to the King of Nepal for redressing their grievances bypassing the Government of India, the Union Minister of Law, Asoke Sen, released the letter written by Ghising to Buta Singh, where he expressed regret for sending such letter. During his third visit to West Bengal in three months, on 20th December, 1986, at Darjeeling, the Prime Minister actually referred to this letter of regret from Ghising, but to add another twist to this drama, that regret letter too was subsequently disowned by Ghising.

If the defence of the GNLF action by these leaders appears incredible, the argument advanced by the Union Minister of Law, Asoke Sen is even less persuasive. The argument that, since the nationalist leaders in India during the colonial period also sent similar letters to other countries and institutions outside India, GNLF could not be faulted for writing to the United Nations, the King of Nepal and the heads of other countries is indeed shocking; by implication, GNLF's agitation is comparable to a movement for national liberation from colonial freedom, according to the opinion of the esteemed Law Minister and a prominent legal practitioner of the country.

Judging by the spate of statements emanating from the Union Ministers and Congress (I) leaders, big or small, if anything, they cannot be accused of consistency. If the Prime Minister is ruling out regional autonomy, the Union Law Minister tells the Press that for giving such autonomy no amendment to the Constitution would be necessary, and this indeed would help to assuage the feeling of the Nepali-speaking masses. The Union Home Minister then adds in his statement to Rajyasabha on 13th November, that the Indian Government has not ruled out regional autonomy as such, but that it would necessitate constitutional amendment, without realising that this flatly contradicts what the Prime Minister had been emphatically saying all along, particularly during his West Bengal visit. When asked by members what stops the Central Government from bringing about the necessary constitutional amendment the Home Minister preferred not to reply, but then curiously ended his speech by saying that the Indian Government would not accept "any move towards weakening of the national unity through the regional autonomy by amending the Constitution", thus contradicting his own statement a few moments earlier. On the question of the recognition of Nepali language in the eighth schedule, the formal position of the Indian Government until now was that it could not be considered. During his visit to Darjeeling the Prime Minister appeared to modify this position by saying that Nepali's inclusion in the eighth schedule was under consideration; but after his return to Delhi it was officially announced that the Prime Minister had given no such undertaking. In the third week of October Das Munshi declared that the agitation was for the State Government to handle,

and it should tell the Centre if it was failing in its task; only then the Government at the Centre would enter the picture. Within two weeks, on 6th November, that position underwent a dramatic change when Das Munshi asserted that this issue had nothing to do with the State Government, since the movement of GNLf was directed against the Centre. In another week's time, the position shifted again when, after meeting the Chief Minister on 15th November, Das Munshi declared that their views on Gorkhaland were identical. In some of his earlier speeches Das Munshi decried the report of conflicts between the Left Front parties and GNLf in the Darjeeling Hills as a myth propagated by the former to win support in the plains, but his present position is that it is CPI (M) which is responsible for violence against innocent GNLf supporters. Such self-contradictions galore. The Prime Minister firmly believes that the Centre has no role to play on this issue, but this does not prevent him from visiting Darjeeling to speak on this subject nor does it stop his ministers and senior officials from engaging in correspondence or dialogue with GNLf without consultation with the State Government and sometimes even concealing such contacts from the State Government. The confusions created by such contradictory statements help only those who, taking advantage of the lack of resolve and narrow electoral concern on the part of the central leadership, are trying to balkanise the country.

In one of the speeches the Prime Minister said, "There is nothing antinational in the movement of the Gorkhas", though, as explained by the Chief Minister, the State Government had never said that the "Gorkhas" were antinational. To describe the GNLf-led agitation as antinational is not the same thing as describing the entire Nepali-speaking population in the Hills as antinational. On the contrary, as pointed out by the Chief Minister, those giving their lives in fighting against GNLf-sponsored separatism are also Nepali-speaking. In another statement in September, 1986, the Prime Minister accused that West Bengal was not giving jobs to the Nepalis but was preferring the Bengalis for jobs in the Hills. He also stated, at his meeting in Haldia, that the 'chauvinism' of the West Bengal Government was at the root of the Gorkhaland issue. To this, the editorial of Indian Express dated 23.9.86 replied, "In fact it is the Centre which has turned down the Left Front Government's plea for including the Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution." The fact is that the administration in Darjeeling is largely run by the local people themselves. On the other hand, the majority of the Nepali-speaking people in the State live and work outside the Darjeeling Hills, in harmony with the rest of the people in the State. The willingness of the Left Front Government to accord regional autonomy to the Darjeeling Hills would hardly fit into the definition of 'chauvinism'. Nor would another accusation that the State Government is permitting large-scale infiltration of Nepali nationals conform to this charge of narrow provincialism. Interestingly, given the self-contradictory nature of these accusations, most of these cancel out one another. To its credit, the State Government has actively sponsored Nepali language for use in official

transactions in the Hills, has set up a Nepali translation cell and a Nepali press and has established Nepali Academy for promoting the language and culture of the Nepali people. A large meeting hall has been constructed in the name of the great Nepali Poet Bhanubhakt Acharya and literary awards are also given in his name. On this account the performance of the Left Front Government has been many times better more than what its predecessor Government succeeded in doing over a period of thirty years. Here also one notices another instance of double talk—the State Government being criticised at the same time for being both chauvinistic and presumably anti-Nepali and also for fomenting Nepali separatism by stressing on the demands for the recognition of Nepali language and for regional autonomy.

Similar attempts to introduce non-issues are also found in the repeated references in the speeches of the Congress (I) leaders to the plight of the Nepali-speaking people in the Hills because of their alleged neglect by the Left Front Government. Ajit Panja, then Minister of Planning, was the first to allege in May that the fund meant for the development of Darjeeling Hills was being diverted for the development work in the plains. He was followed by Siddharta Sankar Roy, Governor of Punjab, who contended on July 30, 1986 in Calcutta that “our Hill brothers and sisters” had some genuine grievances, (without specifying which those were), and that if those were sincerely looked into “a sea change in the Hill situation could be brought about”. Then followed similar statements from others including Buta Singh and Rajiv Gandhi. Ghani Khan Chowdhury was not left behind when, after making CPI(M) solely responsible for the unrest in Darjeeling, he stated on 28th September that “innocent tribals in hill areas of Darjeeling all along continued to receive a raw deal at the hands of Shri Jyoti Basu. It is high time for the State Government to realise that only economic development of the neglected area can bring about harmony and peace”. This statement shows that Khan Chowdhury is not aware that Nepalis do not consider themselves as tribals, though the Lepchas, the original inhabitants of the Hills are one of the scheduled tribes. Nor does he know, despite being the Minister in charge of Programme Implementation, that the ‘stereo-type’ of primitive Hill people engaging in shifting cultivation does not apply to the Nepalis who are among the advanced communities in West Bengal. In fact, as illustrated in the September document, leaving aside the four districts around Calcutta and Burdwan, economically and in terms of literacy and health facilities, Darjeeling’s position is better than that in any other district in West Bengal. Further, whereas in 1986-87 the per capita plan outlay in Darjeeling is Rs. 421, the corresponding figure for the State as a whole is Rs. 142.

It is ironical that the economic issues are being raised again and again by the Union Ministers and the luminaries of Congress (I) despite the categorical statement of Ghising himself, in an interview published on 16th August, 1986, that “We are not quarrelling with West Bengal. Neither do we have any economic grievances other than those which are

common everywhere in the country. Indeed we are better off than many of the districts in West Bengal." Then, refusing to become a part of Sikkim he added, "If we are to be a part of any other state it is thousand times better to be in West Bengal." This attempt to add an economic dimension to the dispute, and thereby justify the agitation in the eyes of the people in the other areas of the country, is mystifying unless the explanation is sought in terms of crude electoral calculations. Such statements are being made when the very same leaders are offering unsolicited advice to the State Government not to politicise the issue for electoral purposes.

A similar cynical attitude is revealed in their statements on the violence being perpetrated by GNLF. The editorial of Indian Express on 23rd November expressed surprise that the Prime Minister "did not find it necessary to even once condemn the violence unleashed by the supporters of the GNLF, or express sympathy for their victims." Not only that he refrained from condemning such violence, even the murderous attack on an MP failed to elicit a courteous expression of concern. Later, when asked why he did not condemn the attack on Ananda Pathak, Buta Singh stated on 6th November, that he actually did express his condemnation, but the Calcutta Press did not publish it as it was subjected to CPI(M) pressure and influence. Even assuming, for the sake of argument, that this ridiculous statement is hundred per cent correct, one wonders why the dailies published outside West Bengal failed to carry his statement. One might ask:—are they too subjected to CPI(M) pressure and influence ?

More recently, attempts are being made to equate GNLF violence with the acts of self-defence by the victims in some areas. The Prime Minister stated on 4th November, "Violence has to be condemned in the strongest words, either by the Gorkhas or the people of the ruling party itself in West Bengal." He even threatened that if, as a result of the violence perpetrated by CPI(M) the 'Gorkhas' turned antinational, the fault would lie with the State Government. In other statements he referred to the 'Gorkhas' having been pushed to a corner. In his speech in the Darjeeling meeting, instead of appealing to the supporters of GNLF to forsake the path of violence, he launched a vicious attack on the State Government and CPI(M) for 'using party cadres' against the 'Gorkhas'. On 13th November, 1986, he stated that both sides in the conflict were at fault and the State Government was 'playing with fire.' On the same day the Union Home Minister accused CPI(M) of playing 'holi of blood', placed 'greater responsibility' for the conflicts in the Hills on the same party, and then concluded "both sides have indulged in violence; all of us must condemn them." Referring to Prime Minister's remarks on GNLF, Times of India commented in its editorial on 22.9.86, "If the remarks are aimed at maximising the Left Front Government's discomfiture over the GNLF agitation, then he is guilty of putting party before national interests...Already, violence and terror have become the mainstay of the

GNLF campaign and bloody clashes between its supporters and those of the CPI(M) have become all too frequent. Mr. Ghising has never shied away from threatening the most dire consequences, 'if the situation goes beyond control'. New Delhi's ambivalence on the issue can only weaken those trying to contain him, while encouraging him to take an even harder line."

In an earlier editorial (15.9.86) the same paper referred to the "xenophobic campaign of murder and terror" by GNLF, which is "on the war path." In another editorial (10.11.86) it expressed surprise that the Prime Minister "virtually equated the violence of the GNLF with the retaliations of CPI(M) members under siege in Darjeeling." The editorial of Hindu (1.8.86) expressed concern about the "the path of confrontation deliberately chosen by the Gorkha National Liberation Front" which "has created a grave law and order situation in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal." A subsequent editorial of Hindu (24.12.86) criticised the fact that "the Prime Minister has chosen to equate the GNLF violence with the democratic-political fight back by the CPI(M) cadres." Telegraph, in its editorial on 19.7.86, referred to "The rhetoric that is being vented in Darjeeling Hills" as "extraordinary", and then quoted Ghising's interview with the paper: "We will either be finished or achieve Gorkhaland... We will fight into death. ... We will unsheath our khukris and behead all of them (central forces)." Even the editorial of Statesman (24.9.86) which cautioned the State Government against "provocations for which the GNLF, Congress(I) and the Centre are all waiting," showed a clearer understanding of the nature of the conflict when it stated: "CPI(M) supporters in the Hills have lived under considerable pressure ever since the agitation began. The eviction notices served on some members, the menacing militancy that marks all GNLF pronouncements and the sporadic attacks on the homes of Marxist workers have all added to the sense of anxiety and insecurity that grips life in the Hills. In the circumstances, the party's local cadres may well have argued that they would be swept away if they did not make a stand at some stage and resist terrorist tactics," This editorial was, however, under the wrong impression that the conflict was taking place "on ethnic lines, albeit with the two sides camouflaged as CPI(M) and GNLF," and cautioned the former against any retaliation which 'because of ethnic division' would 'add fuel to fire'; though the fact is that those taking a stand against the separatist attack are also Nepali-speaking.

To say the least, such statements, coming from the highest authority in the country, amount to exonerating GNLF from all responsibility for its violent acts, apart from the communal and inappropriate use of the term 'Gorkha' being oblivious of the fact that those fighting against GNLF marauders are also Nepali-speaking. Referring to his statement that the blame for the 'Gorkhas' turning antinational in future would lie with the State Government, the editorial of Times of India on 10th November has the following to say:

"This is extraordinary and virtually amounts to politically exculpating its future behaviour in advance," at a time when the State Government needed firm political backing from the Central Government.

This brings us to the Darjeeling visit of the Prime Minister on 20th December, where he addressed a public gathering with a handful of locals in the audience. Apart from reiterating that he was opposed to the division of Bengal and regional autonomy and that he was concerned about the development in the Hill areas, he chose the State Government as his target of attack and made it, rather than GNLF, responsible for the situation in the Darjeeling Hills. Taking into account the poor attendance in the meeting, and that his speech contained nothing that had not been said by him earlier, one wonders what was the point of this visit against its formal position that the Central Government had no role to play on this issue? We have already noted that GNLF looked upon him as his ally, erected welcome arches for him and expressed their affection for him by way of posters. If the objective was to do some straight talking in order to induce the protagonists of Gorkhaland to renounce their demand and abjure violence, the main thrust of the speech, by putting the State Government on the dock, actually did the opposite as it was seen as defending GNLF against the criticisms of the State Government. Following this speech Ghising has reiterated his demand for Gorkhaland by 1987, and has even retracted his regret letter for writing to the King of Nepal and the United Nations. The Prime Minister, however, made the point that the poor attendance in his meeting proved that there was no alliance between GNLF and Congress(I) against the State Government and the Left Front on this issue. To an impartial observer the poor attendance would demonstrate something else—that the organisation of Congress(I), which only a year ago commanded more than one-third of the electoral support, has ceased to exist in the Hills, and that its cadres have indeed gone over to the side of GNLF. The latter has expressed no bitterness regarding the comments of the Prime Minister, and has instead given a call for 'anti-Bengal agitation'. Nor is it an accident that Das Munshi, during his last visit to Darjeeling prior to the visit of the Prime Minister, referred to the death of a Congress(I) supporter in the hands of CPI(M) activists; but the person named by him is also claimed by GNLF as its member, and the latter actually called a bandh for several days after his death. In a report published on 5th November, Subrata Mukherjee criticised the Congress(I) leaders in the Hills for hobnobbing with the GNLF leaders, and pointed to the visit regularly paid by Lapka Dong, one of the leading lights of GNLF, to the Congress(I) office in Darjeeling. If the sole purpose of the visit of the Prime Minister was to demonstrate that Congress(I) had no understanding with GNLF in the Hills, taking the totality of the relationship between those two political forces and their common hostility towards the State Government, one can fairly conclude that the Prime Minister's precious time was wasted in the Hills.

Here, the objective of pointing to these inconsistencies, double-talks, evasions and straight forward untruths is not to score points, but to underline the ways in which the difficulties facing the State Government in handling a high complex and potentially explosive situation have been compounded by these numerous acts of omission and commission on the part of the Central Government and the national and state leaders of Congress(I). All these have added grist to the propaganda mill of the separatists and have confused the unknowing peace-loving Nepali-speaking masses.

What is not being realised by the Central leadership is that all these statements—which taken together, convey different kinds of messages and signals to different parties in the dispute—might eventually turn out to be self-defeating. GNLF and its policies have dangerous implications, not only for the State Government of West Bengal or the Left Front, but for the country as a whole. Whatever be its formal declarations—regarding its commitment to Bharat Mata or to a legal, peaceful, constitutional means of struggle—these should be recognised as no more than tactical moves. Words have been circulated by mouth that the Central Government would concede Gorkhaland after the election to the State Assembly, that whatever is being said by the Prime Minister regarding non-division of Bengal should not be taken at its face value, that the Prime Minister is sympathetic to its demand for a separate State and that, in the alternative, he is someone who can be pressurised by a show of force to make a deal. While GNLF is desperately trying to create a rift between the two Governments—at the Centre and at the State level—in order to weaken the resolve of those who are fighting for national unity and to strengthen its own credibility and standing among the Nepali-speaking masses, the Government at the Centre seems to have fallen into that trap. We feel that it is necessary for these two Governments to join hands and to demonstrate a common and united stand against these divisive and separatist forces. The words and deeds of these two Governments should be such that those should leave no room for any misunderstanding regarding their determination to fight this menace.

IV. THE STANDPOINT OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT

In this section we begin by replying to some of the criticisms which have been voiced against the State Government by the Central Government, Congress(I) leaders and some newspapers.

One of the issues raised is why the State Government is unwilling to sit with Ghising and other GNLf leaders for a negotiated settlement of the present impasse ? Reply to that is that the State Government is far from unwilling to meet any one if that helps to restore peace in the Darjeeling Hills; but in case of GNLf certain conditions would have to be fulfilled. They would have to express regret for writing letters to the King of Nepal and the United Nations. They would also have to withdraw their demand for a separate State. Furthermore, they would have to desist from violence in the Hills. Once these conditions are fulfilled there would be no difficulty in meeting the leaders of GNLf for discussing their grievances, if any, and for their advice and opinion regarding the development and administration in the Hills.

It should also be noted again that from the very beginning GNLf has repeatedly refused to engage in any dialogue with the State Government on this issue, on the ground that its demand can only be conceded by the Government at the Centre. This position has been recently reiterated by Ghising following the visit of the Prime Minister to the Hills. Furthermore, by closing all alternatives to the present arrangement including the establishment of an autonomous regional set up under the overall control of the State Government, the Prime Minister has ensured that such negotiation would yield no result. While the Union Home Minister is claiming to have prepared the ground for such negotiation between the State Government and GNLf, it is not at all clear what kind of result the Central Government is expecting such meeting to come up with. There would be no point in formal chats and mutual exchange of courtesies, if, after raising much expectation, this leads to no meaningful result.

Another criticism is that, while the State Government is criticising GNLf for being antinational, it has not taken the necessary administrative steps to control such antinational activities, such as arresting Ghising and other leaders of GNLf. It is curious, that the very same leaders who are demanding the arrest of Ghising are at the same time urging the State Government to sit with Ghising for negotiation. In any case, this criticism exposes a basic

difference in approach between the Central and the State Governments. While this criticism sees the agitation in Darjeeling Hills merely as a law and order problem, the State Government views it as a highly complex one which should be primarily resolved through political means. The basic approach of the State Government is to isolate the separatists from the broader Nepali-speaking masses through propaganda and other actions. It recognises the fact that a large section of the Nepali-speaking population have been unnerved by the evictions in Assam and Meghalaya, and by the refusal of the Central Government to recognise their language by listing it in the eighth schedule. The GNLF campaign has shrewdly played on their fear and sense of insecurity. Many peace-loving ordinary Nepali-speaking people have been misled into believing that without a separate State of their own they would run the risk of being driven out from India on the false ground of their being Nepali citizens. The main task facing the State Government is to provide them with correct information, allay their fears about citizenship and deprotection, and to make them feel that they are as much a part of West Bengal as any one else. The steps taken by the State Government to widen the use of Nepali language in official communications in the Hills and to encourage their cultural and literary activities is a part of this exercise to remove their fear and to combat the separatist campaign of disinformation. That this approach is bearing fruits is evident from the heroic resistance being given by the Nepali-speaking people themselves to the separatist attempt to establish their hegemony in the Hills; something which has not happened elsewhere on this scale.

To abandon this policy and to resort to Police and Military alone would be disastrous. Such policy has failed in the North-East and in Punjab. Even in Darjeeling, attacks by GNLF activists in Kalimpong and Kurseong on armed personnel with khukri had the ulterior motive of provoking the Police to resort to fire, which provided the separatists with the martyrs and helped to rouse passion among common people. The issue is therefore not one of bludgeoning the separatists to submission with a show of force, but to convince the ordinary people that this agitation was unnecessary and that it is already greatly harming the economy and the social life in the Hills. Obviously, it is the duty of the Government to govern, and given the violent character of this movement Police actions cannot be altogether avoided; but the State Government would never see the deployment of force as the only means of combating the separatists.

A third criticism is that the State Government took no action to combat this movement earlier, though it was formed in 1980 and its letter to the King of Nepal was sent in 1983. Reply to this is simply that until a year ago GNLF was no more than one of many obscure fringe groups. Very few people heard of Ghising or GNLF until very recently, and its call for boycotting 1984 December election went unheeded. There were other separatist movements with stronger mass base, with which the State Government was mainly concerned.

In any case, the aggregate strength of all the separatist forces taken together was far from alarming. Three major political parties of more or less equal strength dominated the political scene—CPI(M), Gorkha League and Congress(I). The sudden emergence of this movement can only be explained by the sharp deterioration in communal relations and the growth of separatist and divisive forces all over the country, particularly over the past two years. It can be said with confidence that, had there been no accord with the separatists in Assam and Mizoram and no eviction of Nepali-speaking people from Meghalaya and Assam, there would have been no occasion for discussing the separatist menace in Darjeeling today. Furthermore, the virtual liquidation of Congress(I) and Gorkha League Organisations in the Hills has considerably added to the strength of GNLF—in terms of cadres and influence. Nor can one be oblivious of the external influences at work, e.g., an extension of the 'Operation Brahmaputra' designed by the United States imperialists to dismember India; otherwise how can one explain the emergence of separatist movements in Punjab and Darjeeling Hills which produce some of the best soldiers of the country or the continuous flow of money to finance GNLF activists and activities.

Furthermore, this criticism assumes that on the issues relating to national integrity the Government at the Centre has no role to play. One might ask what action the latter took after receiving a copy of the letter sent to the King of Nepal by GNLF, or whether any effort was made to bring this to the knowledge of the State Government. Or, what steps are being taken by the Central Government how to monitor the movements of the GNLF leaders to other States and to Nepal through its intelligence outfits, and whether the State Government is being kept informed regarding those movements? As far as the State Government is concerned, so far it has received no report regarding the visits of Ghising to Delhi and other places. Rather than seeing the State Government as its rival, a more appropriate attitude befitting a Central Government would be to devise a system for exchanging information on separatists activities and to coordinate their activities for combating those.

The State Government and the Left Front parties have been criticised for raising the issue of regional autonomy which, according to the Central Government, has strengthened the forces of separatism in the Hills. In the September document we have already given an elaborate reply to this point. Here it is sufficient to note that this demand has been voiced by all the parties in the State, including Congress(I), the party of the Prime Minister. Both in 1967 and in 1981, Congress(I) was a party to unanimous resolutions passed by the State Assembly demanding regional autonomy for the Darjeeling Hills. By singling out CPI(M) and other parties for making this demand, the Central Government is guilty of distortion of facts and of attempting to derive electorate mileage by misleading the general public on this important issue. If the latter feels that the demand for regional autonomy is unjustified, it should put forward his arguments rather than unfairly blaming the leftwing parties for instiga-

ting separatism by way of regional autonomy when the ruling party at the Centre is (or rather was) also associated with this demand.

The Prime Minister should also explain, if in his opinion advocacy for regional autonomy amounts to advocacy for separatism, why then the Constitution of the country itself makes provision for regional autonomy in certain situations? If the Prime Minister is unhappy with that particular constitutional arrangement, he should clarify whether he is contemplating its deletion from the Constitution of the country? It would also be necessary to evaluate the experience of the District Autonomous Council in Tripura—which accounts for the greater part of the territory of that State, unlike Darjeeling Hills which constitute a minor proportion of the State territory of West Bengal—whether it has strengthened or minimised separatist tendencies. The fact that the tribal population of Tripura have overwhelmingly voted for the Left Front in the Council elections and have inflicted a severe defeat on the Upajati Yuba Samity would confirm that it has helped to enhance the confidence of the ethnic minorities in the State administration. Regional autonomy, in reasonably large, compact areas where the ethnic minorities constitute the majority, can be seen as an effective administrative arrangement for safeguarding the language and culture of the ethnically distinct minorities in some specific situations—but the Central Government is unwilling to examine this proposal in depth.

Lastly, let us reiterate our view that West Bengal is as much a homeland for the Nepali-speaking people living here as it is for the other communities. We see our State as a mosaic of various cultures and ways of life, where each community has an important role to play, by enriching and diversifying the overall culture of the State and by making the social life more varied and enjoyable. Nepali-speaking minorities, with their distinct language and customs are an integral part of the cultural heritage and landscape of the State of ours. They cannot have a more secure and safer homeland than West Bengal, which prides itself in its glorious tradition of communal harmony.

POSTSCRIPT

Following two meetings in Delhi between the Prime Minister of India and the Chief Minister of West Bengal on 8th and 14th January, the two Governments agreed to evolve a common approach towards the solution of the problems relating to the agitation. We have already noted that this had been the consistent position of the State Government ever since the beginning of this agitation. The official communique released after these talks stressed on the fact that both of the two Governments are opposed to the division of West Bengal. Though this simply reiterated the formal position of the two Governments, the very fact that it was put forward as the common view of these two Governments and was not mixed up with other issues, would make the statement an effective instrument against the GNLFF propaganda among the Nepali-speaking masses that the Central Government is on its side.

The two leaders called for a negotiated settlement of the issue, and for this the two Governments, various political parties as well as GNLFF would be involved in the discussion. For this purpose they stressed on the need for the creation of a suitable environment. They took note of the regret expressed by Ghising for sending letters to the United Nations, King of Nepal and other heads of States, which made it possible to accept GNLFF as a party to this negotiated settlement. However, the two Governments stressed that, to create the necessary atmosphere for such talk "violence and counterviolence should be eschewed and the writ of the Administration must run in the Darjeeling area uninterruptedly." The two leaders also hoped that GNLFF would now call off the declared "Anti-Bengal Day", as another important step towards the creation of such suitable environment for negotiated settlement.

Afterwards, replying to the reporters, the Chief Minister clarified that in this 'negotiated settlement' the creation of a separate State would not be on the agenda. GNLFF should recognise that this demand would not be acceptable to either of these two Governments. At the same time the two leaders would be willing to discuss other issues relating to the economic, social and political life in the Darjeeling Hills. The issue of citizenship for the immigrants from Nepal could be one such major issue. Further, various issues relating to the economic development in the Hills, including measures for improving the functioning of the Hill Development Council could be considered in those discussions. Though not stated in the press release or discussed between the two leaders, some of the other major related issues such as the question of the inclusion of Nepali language in the eighth schedule of the Constitution or of regional autonomy and similar administrative-cultural issues might also be

raised by various parties to the discussion. The main objective of such discussion would be to bring peace and restore normal conditions in the Hills, and to adopt measures which would improve the conditions of life in the Hills. The fact that both of the two Governments would be together in the discussion on these issues is highly important since the Constitutional jurisdiction of the State Government would not permit them to take decisions on most of those.

APPENDIX

SOME ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE LIFE IN DARJEELING HILLS

In our September document we made the point that, contrary to the impression being projected by some of the self-proclaimed well wishers of the people in the Hills that the root of the discontent lies in its economic backwardness, the Darjeeling Hill area, though poor and backward, is not poorer and more backward than the rest of the State. In economic terms, based on most indicators, its position is better than that in the rest of the State, and decidedly better than those in the northern and western districts of the State. We pointed out that, among the 16 districts of the State, in terms of per capita income Darjeeling's position is fourth after Calcutta, Howrah and Burdwan, and in terms of urbanisation (including Siliguri in the plains) it ranks after Calcutta Metropolitan district (including Howrah, Hooghly and 24-Parganas) and Burdwan. Even taking only the Hills of Darjeeling into account, the ranking remains unchanged. In terms of infrastructural facilities—banking, medical institutions, holding of radio licenses—the figures are considerably higher than the State average. In terms of cross breeding Darjeeling (almost entirely in the Hills) with a proportion of 64.59% of cross-bred cattle, is miles ahead of the very low State average of 9.66%.

Here we are giving five more tables to underline this point. Table 3 shows that in terms of literacy, Darjeeling Hills is considerably ahead of the rest of the State. Though in 1971 the difference between the two was not much, by 1981 the gap has considerably widened in favour of the Darjeeling Hills. This table also shows that within the district the Hill areas are more advanced than the plains despite the existence of Siliguri city. Table 5 shows that the population density in Darjeeling Hills is much higher than the comparable figures for other Hill tracts in the country, excepting Nilgiri Hills in the south. This high density is not accidental and is closely linked with the migratory movements induced by the relative economic prosperity in this area, largely because of the growth of the tea gardens and tourism. Nilgiri Hills is also known for its plantations and tourism industry. Without these two economic activities the population density in Darjeeling Hills could not have been higher than those for the neighbouring Hill areas. It also indicates that, if these two major economic activities are allowed to stagnate due to this agitation, the economy of the Darjeeling Hills would be unable to accommodate its present population.

Table 4 gives the percentages of "workers" in the Darjeeling Hills, which is higher than that for the country as a whole, and significantly higher than that in the rest of the State. Its obverse, the proportion of non-workers, is correspondingly lower in the Darjeeling Hills.

Table 1 shows how the expenditure for planned development of Darjeeling Hills, from both the State and the Central account, has more than trebled over the past one decade—from Rs. 37.22 crores during the fifth plan period to Rs. 122.98 crores during the seventh plan period. On a per capita basis one finds that the plan expenditure in the Darjeeling Hills is thrice the amount spent in the State as a whole.

TABLE 1

Expenditure under various plans

(Unit Rs. crores)

Plan			Total	Special Central assistance	State plan
Fifth plan					
(1974-79)	..	..	37.22	15.00	22.22
(1979-80)	..	..	10.82	3.99	6.83
Sixth plan					
(1980-85)	..	..	78.84	29.43	49.41
Seventh plan outlay					
(1985-90)	..	..	122.98	44.55	78.43

TABLE 2

Per capita Plan Expenditure in West Bengal and Darjeeling Hills

(Unit—Rupees)

Plan		West Bengal	Darjeeling Hills
Five years	: Fifth plan	.. 283	775
	Sixth plan	.. 446	1,431
	Seventh plan (outlay)	756	2,232
Single year	: 1979-80	.. 86	226
	1984-85	.. 124	421
	1985-86	.. 124	449
	1986-87 (out lay)	.. 142	421

TABLE 3

Literacy Rates in 1971 and 1981

				1971	1981
India	..	..	..	29.40	36.23
West Bengal	..	..	..	33.20	40.94
Darjeeling District	..	..	..	33.07	42.50
Darjeeling Hills	..	..	..	34.56	45.27

TABLE 4

Proportion of Workers and Non-workers in 1981
(as percentages of the total population)

					Workers	Non- workers
India	..	..	..	..	33.50	66.50
West Bengal	..	..	..	..	28.89	71.11
Darjeeling Hills	..	..	..	..	36.00	64.00

TABLE 5

Population density (per square kilometer) in 1981

India	..	..	..	..	..	216
Darjeeling Hills	..	..	..	..	..	228
West Bengal	..	..	..	..	..	615
Darjeeling District	..	..	..	..	..	325
U.P. Hill Areas	..	..	..	..	..	95
Assam Hill Areas	..	..	..	..	..	41
Nilgiri Hill District	..	..	..	..	..	247
Sikkim	..	..	..	..	..	45
Himachal Pradesh	..	..	..	..	..	77
Manipur	..	..	..	..	..	64
Meghalaya	..	..	..	..	..	60
Nagaland	..	..	..	..	..	47
Mizoram	..	..	..	..	..	23
Arunachal	..	..	..	..	..	8

Published by the Director of Information, Government of West
Bengal and Printed at Sree Saraswaty Press Ltd. (A W. B. Govt.
Undertaking), Calcutta-700 009

50,000/22.1.87