

ically been a cockpit of intrigue by foreign forces. These have included the Chinese, who have trained and armed guerrilla forces of various hill tribes demanding "independence" from India, and Anglo-American intelligence, whose operations have included the deployment of Anglican and Baptist missionaries working with the largely animist hill tribes. It is such tribesmen who carried out these latest massacres.

### The Assam tangle

These outside operations have fed upon the tangle of problems in Assam. The latest violence comes after three years of virtual

state by Assamese agitators who have proclaimed that "foreigners"—mostly Bengalis from neighboring Bangladesh as well as people from other parts of India—have migrated illegally into the state, reducing the native population to a minority. The anti-foreigner agitation, spearheaded by the All-Assam Student Union (AASU), has within its fold numerous tribal, ethnic, and outright separatist elements, as well as anti-Moslem Hindu extremists.

Assam is a state of 23 million, small by Indian standards, but very diverse in racial, ethnic, and linguistic characteristics. The 1961 census revealed that about a third of the population was Assamese, 38 percent of Bengali origin, and 13 percent from other parts of India. The rest includes numerous hill tribes, who see both the Assamese of the river valleys and plains and the migrants as economic threats. There is also great religious diversity, with a largely Hindu Assamese population and both Hindu and Muslim Bengalis.

Since 1977 the state has been under siege, with agitators demanding that the government set 1961 as the cutoff date for identification of "foreigners" in the state and their removal from the electoral roles. The government of Mrs. Gandhi, after it came to power in January of 1980, acknowledged that there was a problem of heavy immigration influx into the state, though the numbers are disputed—the agitators claim that several million people are "foreigners." The government has tried to establish a more recent cutoff date for identifying "foreigners."

The government has also maintained that an Indian can settle in any part of the country, and that part of the problem of the Northeast is one of economic development of the entire area to provide more opportunities for all. The problem of Bangladeshi immigrants is a politically sensitive question. Since Assam is relatively thinly populated, covers a relatively large area, is rich in natural resources, and borders states with large populations and meager resources, the migration has reflected the destitution and economic imbalances of the rest of the region.

While negotiations have been ongoing between the central government and the state agitators, the Hindu chauvinist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has involved itself in the state, inciting "Hindu" sentiments against immigrant Bangladeshi

## Anglo-American media push to 'Iranize' India

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) fired the opening shots in a press campaign to undermine India's national integrity when, ignoring previously reported facts on the Assam tragedy, the agency proclaimed it a "Hindu versus Muslim communal conflict." BBC set the pace for the rest of the Western editorial gristmills in thus invoking the horror of the 1947 partition and building an atmosphere of inevitability around its alleged repetition today. (It was the BBC, of course, which did so much to bring the ayatollahs to power in Iran.)

The London *Observer* picked up this theme on Feb. 20 with a vicious piece, "Fifty Battalions Fail to Halt Assam Riots," which declared, "If Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi fails in Assam, she may have only the Army to fall back on as the last force able to prevent Sikhs, Nagas, Mizos, Manipuris, Kashmiris, and other Indian nationalities from breaking away and asserting independence."

Lest the point be unclear, the article is accompanied by a caricature of Mahatma Gandhi, head bowed and uttering his famous, "Oh God, no," upon learning of the outbreak of Hindu-Muslim riots in 1947. For all those Westerners with the impression of Sir Richard Attenborough's film *Gandhi* fresh in their mind, this acts to confirm the monstrous lie that movie tells, namely that the carnage of the 1947 Hindu-Muslim riots was the product of some innate Indian tendency toward fratricide, rather than the consciously planned product of Britain's imposition of partition.

The *New York Times* in turn echoed this line in a Feb. 23 editorial: "The Prime Minister is no more directly to blame for the Assam riots than was the great Mahatma for the dreadful bloodletting that attended the nation's birth," the *Times* intones, adding that the Assam problem is insoluble.

Muslims. Muslim fundamentalist elements have also been active. The fear that the BJP has fed since 1979 is that Muslims are out to "overrun" the Northeast if measures to stop the ethnic shift are not undertaken.

### Government action

The government found itself in a bind this year. According to the constitution, elections could no longer be postponed unless the government amended the constitution in