

Symposium on
**Inner Line Permit as an Instrument of Safeguarding Ethnic
Identity**

Organized by
Gauhati University Institute of North East India Studies (GUINEIS)

Venue – H.K. Barpujari Bhawan, G.U.

Date: 12th February, 2016

Inaugural Programme(10.30 – 1130 AM):

The panel of the inaugural programme formed with eminent personalities- Dr. Mridul Hazarika, the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor of Gauhati University, Guwhati, Assam, Prof. M.P. Bezbaruah, Director, GUINEIS and the Chief guest Prof. Udayan Misra, Department of English, Dibrugarh University, Assam. The programme was chaired by the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor.

The welcome address was delivered by Prof. M.P. Bezbaruah, Director, GUINEIS. Prof. Bezbaruah in his deliberation stated the objectives behind the symposium and the possible contribution of it towards policy making on the proposed theme. At this occasion, Prof. Bezbaruah remembered the prominent historian of Assam Late H.K. Barpujari and stated that this is the first public event organized by the institute after he took over the charge of the Director. He also talked about the future programmes of the institute in the fields of academic research.



*Prof. M.P. Bezbaruah, Director, GUINEIS
delivering the welcome address*



*Dr. Mridul Hazarika, the Hon'ble Vice-
Chancellor of Gauhati University delivering
the inaugural speech*

The welcome address was followed by the inaugural speech by Dr. Mridul Hazarika, the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor of Gauhati University, Guwahati (Assam). Dr. Hazarika mentioned that he would like to develop the institute, and also mentioned the role of Prof. Srinath Baruah, Retd. Vice Chancellor, KKHSOU, Assam. Dr. Hazarika also appreciated the symposium of the said theme because of its emerging relevance in the north eastern states of India. He told that lots of psychological factors are associated with ethnic identity issues, and left the details of the theme for other dignitaries to discuss.

Speech by the Chief Guest:

The chief guest of the session, Prof. Udayan Misra, in his valuable deliberation, went a little deep into the historical roots of ILP system in the NE Region where he stated that the present ILP system existing in the region was brought about by the British for protecting the Hills



Speech by Chief Guest Prof. Udayan Misra

Tribes. He also stated the development paradigm in NE region is dictated by the security concern and lot of works is to be done before the ILP system is implemented. Prof. Misra also viewed the ILP from the perspective of Migration – legal or illegal such as huge influx from Bangladesh posing a threat to the region. Prof. Misra gave importance on the land rights

of the indigenous people. He gave examples from Himachal Pradesh, where a person from one district cannot buy land in other district, also from Manipur, where in hills areas transfer of land is severely restricted. According to him mere prevention of people entering the state is not a viable proposition; finding a consistent banner for land rights of indigenous people is important. Hence, stringent measures/legislations are required regarding purchase and acquiring of land and other properties.

FIRST DISCUSSION SESSION

Time: 11.30 – 13.30

Moderator: Prof. M. P. Bezbaruah, Director, GUINEIS

The first discussion session was enriched with deliberation by eminent speakers from diverse fields of academics. The sub-themes discussed in this session include – **Historical Background of ILP system** (by Prof. Meeta Deka, Department of History, Gauhati University), **An Economics Perspective** (by Dr. Ratul Mahanta, Department of Economics, Gauhati University), **The Political Angle** (by Prof. Nani Gopal Mahanta, Dept. of Political Science, Gauhati University), **the Overall Pros and Cons** (by Prof. U.R. Hakasam, Dept. of Assamese, Gauhati University, Guwahati).

Historical Background of ILP system: Prof. Meeta Deka in her valuable deliberation explored the genesis and scope of ILP system in the NE region. She stated that the ILP system existing in the NE Region was introduced by the British to get hegemony over the economic resources and that it is still under the age-old Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations, 1873. Prof. Deka advocated the efficacy of the ILP system in preventing the flow of illegal immigrants.

The Political Angle: Prof. Nani Gopal Mahanta, in his deliberation stated the need for critical scrutiny of the ILP system existing in some of the north eastern states of India. According to him ILP can be used as an instrument to use work permit. However the issue of ILP is questionable in the context of democratic system of governance. Also stated that it is not effective for economic growth and it has not helped the Nagaland state. Regarding land holding status, Prof. Mahanta mentioned that according to a recent statistics 70% of tribal household in Manipur do not have access to land, while the figures are 80% in Mizoram, 76% in Meghalaya, and 57% in Assam. Prof. Mahanta spoke of harmonizing the land issues and identity issues while framing the ILP system.

An Economics Perspective: Dr. Ratul Mahanta, in his presentation on the theme, went through the costs & benefits of ILP. As regard to benefits Dr. Mahanta stated that ILP helps keep account of people entering the state (good for security issue), can help people with permits move freely, can protect indigenous culture and identity. The main issues covered in his presentation include the issue of labor market and tourism sector. Dr. Mahanta presented a

statistics on tourism (in terms of number of visitors) of North Eastern States (both with and without ILP system) where the adverse effect on the sector is not clear. For example, the Arunachal Pradesh, despite of having ILP, can attract a large number of tourists to the state. Regarding labour market Dr. Mahanta said that that Pro-ILP system believes that influx causes unemployment. But notably a recent statistics shows that in Arunachal Pradesh, where ILP system exists, 38% of the labourers are outsiders. On outmigration, he said that it is not only because of the state economic factors, but there are other Push and Pull factors too (many people working in south India). He also said that the effect of influence on socio-economic and political fabric is a myth.

Dr. Mahanta's presentation was enriched with his three case studies in states like Mizoram and Meghalaya. The overall finding of these case studies is that the ILP is not required to protect the strong tribes or it can not guarantee protection, and it has failed to empower people. Dr. Mahanta concluded with valuable remarks – (a) ILP is not the only alternative (b) Even if ILP is introduced, it should not be at the cost of development and (c) Empowerment of people is the first and foremost important.

Pros and Cons of ILP system: Prof. U.R. Hakasam pointed out a lot of issues pertaining to ILP. Among them, Prof. Hakasam said that ILP system may not be helpful in protecting the rights of the indigenous people over land and other property, and it is observed that the outsiders acquire land and other properties by marrying a girl from the concerned state. In this regard, there arises a threat to the identity through adverse effect upon their beliefs and custom and dilution of language, culture etc. He also mentioned that many policies of the government are also imposing a threat to the identity issues, for example, in the Three Language formula the topmost importance is given to the Hindi language. As a result many minor local/indigenous languages are endangered and some fall on the verge of extinction. He also talked of removing the word Tribal from the Tribal belts & Blocks and thereby rename it. After pointing out the loopholes of the present ILP system Prof. Hakasam advocated for the reservation of seats for indigenous people in the state Assembly, formation of some protected blocks/areas. In the absence of these provision, mere implementation of ILP will not help in protecting the identity of indigenous people.



A cross section of the participants



A view of the participants

Concluding Remarks: Prof. Bezbaruah briefly talked about the immigration of labour force in some works where local people are reluctant either because of the nature of the work or low wage. He also talked about the out-migration of people who are working outside thinking that they are earning higher income than agricultural labour here in state which actually is not.

Inputs from the Floor:

Dr. Re kyl (Meghalaya) pointed out that in Meghalaya it is observed that the demonstrations of ILP demand in the state seems to be a way of creating a political support. ILP system has not proved to be an effective tool for protecting illegal immigration, such as in Nagaland, and it creates disintegration with fellow Indians. Instead, the government should give more importance on protecting the international borders.

Sri Dilip Sharma, an NGO Activist, spoke for good governance where every group should have some opportunity and space.

Prof. NaniGopalMahanta said that government cannot be alternative. It is required everywhere.

Sri BhaskarPegu (Research Scholar, IITG) pointed out that illegal immigrants in the states are posing threat to the demographic structure of the states. ILP system can be used to issue work permits to the immigrants, and these people should not be given any political rights in the state they have entered.

Dr. AnkuranDutta (Mass Communication Department, G.U.) stated that Community Radio can play an important role in protecting the identity of the indigenous people.

SECOND DISCUSSION SESSION

Dr. S. Umdar, North Eastern Hills University, pointed out a number of issues of illegal immigrants where he stated that India is a home to a big number of illegal immigrants, and particularly these immigrants are altering the demographic scenario of the states like Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. The presence of large illegal immigrants is proved by a good number of studies. The issue of large illegal immigrants has resulted in demand for ILP system in Assam and Meghalaya. With regard to economic impact Dr. Umdar said that this immigration to the state has led to a shrinking of economic space for the indigenous people. There are adverse effects on the labour market and many illegal immigrants are employed in different sectors. Effective work permit system is to be opened up. There is also adverse effect on holding of land and property rights. Many land transfer acts are ineffective. In Meghalaya, despite of Meghalaya (Benami Transaction Prohibition) Act, 1980, lands are transferred to non-Tribals and there are fake ownerships of property by illegal immigrants. Dr. Umdar pointed out the need for understanding many *internal dynamics* including inequality in land holdings, outmigration, and land rights as a measure of protection of space (less social and economic inequality, constant ecological indicators); the dynamics considered as regulatory failures. The ILP system, which can prevent the physical movement of people, however, cannot prevent these types of development of pores. Many business activities are seen running with fake ownership; many big industries producing adverse ecological effects in Meghalaya (he gave the examples of Cement factories in Meghalaya). Dr. Umdar said that Colonials introduced the ILP to protect the tribal population from the people of the plains, and now ILP is important for protecting ethnic identity; it will protect not only the indigenous tribals but also the non-tribals living since long. However, without good governance, like many other existing acts, the ILP system too will be poorly implemented.

Cross-Currents in Manipur: Dr. L. Haokip detailed the factors behind the demand for ILP system in Manipur. Besides historical factor (Manipur being a Princely state), he identified a 'Fear as a Factor' – fear arising from Naga Peace Talk, which is thought to create disturbance in Manipur. The student organizations AMSU & others like FRIENDS, JCILP (also including some politicians, for example resignation of four NPF MLAs) are taking up the demand for ILP on the issue of illegal immigration to the state. However, the demand has to get a wide support; many Tribal Manipuri people have not joined, and the general strike is confined to some limited districts only. Dr. Haokip showed that the demand for ILP in Manipur has

resulted in a devastating effect including killing of a school student, burning down of police and other administrative office in Manipur.

Lingustic Mosaic: Prof. J.P. Tamuli talked about the relevance of ILP in the context of languages, the main marker of identity. According to him, NE region has one of the greatest diversity of language in the country. Prof. Tamuli said the multilingualism is a resource and our identity is defined in multilingualism, however, in post colonialism, multilingualism is a problem. ILP is not effective in preserving the language diversity. Due to globalization strong languages, like English, are pushing out the weak and small languages. For example, in Arunachal Pradesh despite of having ILP system, Hindi and English have got dominance over other indigenous languages. Prof. Tamuli also presented UNESCO framework on language endangerment from Safe level to their Extinction.



Participants expressing their inputs from the floor

Inputs from the Floor:

- **Prof. Archana Sharma**, (Department of Economics, Gauhati University) pointed out that the markets are opened up without regulations and there have been institutional failures. She put a question to Dr. S. Umdar - whether, other things being equal, ILP is required. In response to her, Dr. Umdar replied that the present ILP systems have nothing to do except issuing pass to the outsiders coming to the state. Dr. Umdar prefers the revival and amendment of the existing legislative laws concerned with the protection of rights of the indigenous people. He agrees the demand for ILP system is mainly because of the institutional failure.
- **Prof. M.P. Bezbaruah** added that the penetration of ICT is a threat to language and the loss of diversity.
- **Dr. Kalyan Das of OKD Institute of Social Change and Development:** Pointed out that there are many pores, apart from physical movement of people, which ILP cannot prevent. Stated that if the 'space' is to be preserved from 'dilution' some outcome indicators are to be identified for ecological, economic and social fronts. Also pointed

out that the dilution in the protected space is because of the need of creation of service centres (administrative, educational, trade) for the well being of people as well as rising consumerism of people. The needs also pushed infrastructure development drive, which is not possible unless people are allowed to enter the lower end jobs (These lower end jobs people are often considered as dilutors). Therefore, for an alternative mode we need studies and debates.

- As a moderator, Prof. A.R. Dutta said that there is no consensus on the need of ILP, and it requires a proper scrutiny.

SUMMARY

It is often mentioned that the present ILP system is based on the age old laws of the country, and the states with ILP system has not proved any significant performance with regard to the protection of identity and property rights of the indigenous people. Apart from that, there seems to be some dilemmas between market economy, democracy and ILP system. The cost and benefit of ILP should go a detailed scrutiny, and even if it is implemented, it should not be in the present form, but be reviewed from the present perspectives through dialogues and arguments, so that it does not hinder the economic growth of the states as well. Besides, ILP and other possible instruments, if any, require a broad study and debate.

Good governance is a prerequisite, but it is a long wait. Proactive role is required to strengthen and empower the people through policies on land protection, health and education, and this role will in its own way result in good governance. However, any policy should be preceded by dialogue so that the pros and cons can be brought to light and necessary provisions can be incorporated in the same.