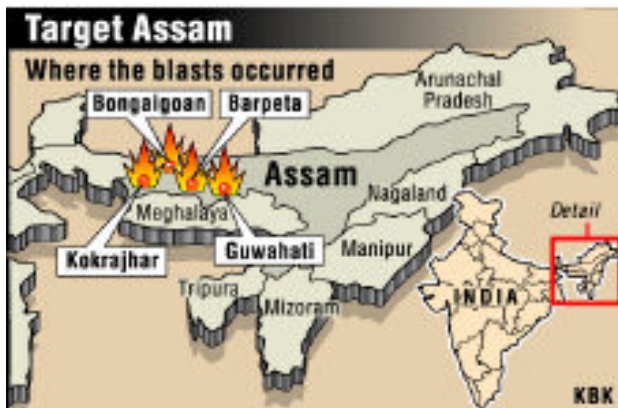


Brief Report on Assam serial blasts: 30 October 2008

The incident:

On Thursday, 30 October 2008, northeastern India was struck by twelve high intensity serial blasts in four districts of Assam- Guwahati, Kokrajhar, Barpeta and Bongaigaon. Six of the blasts occurred in Guwahati one of the biggest cities in Assam while three blasts occurred in Kokrajhar, two blasts in Barpeta and a lone blast in Bongaigaon in lower Assam. As of 31 October 2008, the death toll has risen to 70, while over 300 people have been injured.¹

The locations of the blasts in Assam.



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In Guwahati, 31 people have died and 125 injured in six blasts at four different places in the city. These were in Ganeshguri near the Chief Judicial Magistrate Court premises,, Fancybazar near the Panbazar police station, Bhangagarh and Hatigaon. In Kokrajhar, 20 people died in three serial blasts that rocked the headquarters town of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), while 12 people were killed in twin blasts in Barpeta Road town of Barpeta district in lower Assam. No death was reported in the Bongaigaon blast, which left 10 injured.³

All the blasts took place in busy, crowded public places within a space of 30 minutes. Police reports suggest that RDX and plastic explosives were used in the blast to cause maximum damage and were detonated within five minutes of each other using timer devices – a pattern similar to the recent militant attacks in India over the past year.

¹ “Death toll rises to 70 in Assam blasts”, *IBN Live*, <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/death-toll-rises-to-70-in-assam-blasts/77141-3.html>, 31/10/2008

² <http://www.hindu.com/2008/10/31/stories/2008103157430100.htm>

³ “Terror strikes Assam, 62 killed”, *The Hindu*, 31/10/2008
<http://www.hindu.com/2008/10/31/stories/2008103157430100.htm>

Who may be responsible?

The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)- the biggest and most lethal militant group in the region aiming to form an independent Assamese nation has denied any involvement in the blasts.⁴ The involvement of ULFA also seems to be a difficult to accept since the group does not possess the capability to carry out such an organized series of explosions. Additionally, the use of RDX in the serial blasts has led analysts to believe that ULFA could not have conducted these attacks independently as ULFA traditionally does not use RDX when conducting attacks.

Most Indian security analysts believe that the Harkatul-jihad-e-Islami (HuJI), Bangladesh, -the militant group based in Bangladesh provided logistical support to ULFA to carry out the blasts. Police personnel also claim that it is a splinter group of ULFA which is working closely with HuJI and in fact, has received training from HuJI militants in Chittagong in Bangladesh earlier in April 2008.⁵ Although this argument may hold some ground, there is some doubt in further claims by Assam police that ULFA has taken logistical support from the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). This is because the militant groups operating in northeastern India, although numerous in number, do not possess the capability to carry out such large scale attacks as the 30 October 2008 Assam serial blasts.

HuJI-B's involvement was also suspected in the rather low-key serial blasts in Agartala, Tripura on 1 October 2008. It was believed that bombings were carried out by the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) with support from HuJI-B. The arrest of three Bangladeshis in connection to these blasts indicated that the Bangladesh-based militant group may be linking up with northeastern Indian militant groups.⁶ It is also suggested that HuJI-B is using the northeastern region as a corridor to enter India and set up sleeper cells in different parts of the country possibly with the help of newly formed Islamist organizations like the Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam.⁷

The serial blasts in Assam on 30 October 2008, like previous attack in India this year were largely targeted at civilians and at busy and crowded public areas in urban centers to inflict maximum damage.

Possible implications:

Assam is one of the seven northeastern states that are connected to the Indian mainland by a very thin strip of land. Since the independence of India in 1947, this region has

⁴ "Death toll rises to 70 in Assam blasts", *IBN Live*, 31/10/2008, <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/death-toll-rises-to-70-in-assam-blasts/77141-3.html>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ "Agartala blasts: 3 Bangladeshis arrested", *Hindu*, <http://www.hindu.com/2008/10/04/stories/2008100455491100.htm>

⁷ "Govt suspects HuJI-ULFA set off Assam blasts", *Times of India*, 31/10/2008, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Govt_suspects_HuJI-Ulfa_set_off_Assam_blasts/articleshow/3656344.cms

witnessed the rise and fall of a number of insurgent and ethno-nationalist movements against the Indian state. The region has also been neglected in terms of socio-economic development and hence provides a fertile ground for recruitment of disaffected youth in Assam who wants to vent out their anger against the Indian state. In recent years, the demographics of Assam have changed dramatically with the increasing illegal influx of Bangladeshi immigrants from across the border into northeastern India- especially into these Hindu dominated and tribal areas of Assam.

The 2001 Census figures in Assam showed the increase of Muslim population from 24.56 percent in 1971 to 30.91 percent in 2001 which gives some indication of the vast influx of Bangladeshi Muslims into Assam.⁸ This demographic change has in turn led to tensions between the ethnic Assamese communities who are fearful of slowly losing their political franchise and the immigrants. This was manifested last month in the attacks on Muslims in Assam by indigenous groups. The attacks had killed almost 47 Muslims in September 2008 and Assam was on high alert since then.⁹

The spark for the recent spate of anti-Muslim violence in Assam during August-September 2008 was ignited by a hard-hitting judgement by Justice BK Sarmah of the Guwahati High Court in July 2008. The judgment ordered the deportation of more than 50 Bangladesh nationals who had illegally acquired Indian citizenship and had even become voters in Assam. This judgement brought home the fact that illegal Bangladeshis were all over Assam, acquiring lands, getting precious jobs etc which angered the local indigenous people. Taking matters into their own hands, local Assamese student youth groups started systematic attacks against Bangladeshi Muslims in Assam. The recent serial blasts may have been a backlash against these attacks by Islamist groups like HuJI linked with local groups like ULFA.

⁸ http://www.ipcs.org/North_east_articles2.jsp?action=showView&kValue=2..

⁹ "Assam bombings", *Reuters*, 31/10/2008,
http://www.reuters.com/article/homepageCrisis/idUSDEL373837.CH_.2400

Pictures from the blast sites in Assam.¹⁰



¹⁰ <http://www.hindu.com/2008/10/31/stories/2008103157430100.htm>

