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## **A Study of the Violence between Bodo's and Bengali-speaking Muslim's In Western Assam (2012-2014)**

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### **Abstract:**

*Assam is a land of diversities where various ethnic groups reside together. Assam is enriched with different cultures and natural resources as well its natural beauty. Around 30 Ethnic groups are residing in Assam. Being diverse, Assam has experienced a series of Ethnic conflicts at different period of time especially after the Post –colonial period such as Ethnic violence between Assamese and Bengali speaking people, Anti-foreigner's movement, Assam –Nagaland border violence, Bodo – Santhal Conflict, Khasi-Pnar and Karbi conflict, Karbi – Kuki conflict, Karbi-Dimasa conflict, Bihari-Adivasi conflict, Garo-Rabha conflict, Khasi-Nepali conflict etc. The present paper tries to look only at the Violence between the Bodo's and Bengali-speaking Muslim's in Western Assam during the period of 2012-2014.*

**Keywords: Bodo-Muslim conflict, Insurgency, Counter-Insurgency, State Government's response, Humanitarian Crisis.**

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**I. Introduction:** Assam witnessed a series of Ethnic violence between Bodos and Muslims from 2012 to 2014. The first wave of violence between Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslims erupted in western Assam in July 2012. The immediate cause of the violence between the two communities was the killing of four Bodo youths by a mob belonging to the minority community after being snatched away from the custody of a police party led by Officer-in-Charge of Kokrajhar Police station and Deputy Superintendent of Police on 20th July 2012. On 19th July 2012 two student leaders belonging to the ABSMU and All – Assam Minority Student's Union were shot at near Kokrajhar by unidentified gunmen. Since 20th July 2012, the violence in the BTAD areas including Baksa, Chirang, Kokrajhar and Udalgiri districts and neighbouring Dhubri district had claimed about 90 lives as on 31st August 2012 and displaced over 400,000 people. This internal displacement has been described as the largest one since India's partition (ACHR Report, 2012).

On the other hand, the second wave of violence between Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslim started on 1st may 2014 followed by the general election, when the militants of the NDFB-S gunned down about 41 Bengali Muslims in the Kokrajhar and Baksa districts of Assam. The actual reason was the provocation of Bodo leaders that non-Bodos had not voted for the BPF (then ruling party of BTC) candidates. As many as 46 people were killed by Bodo militants and about 2, 35,385 were displaced in the violence (Iqbal, 2018).

**II. The First Wave of Violence (2012):** The first wave of violence between Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslims started in Kokrajhar district in Western Assam in early July 2012, when two Bengali-speaking Muslim men were killed by the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) cadres on July 6. No security measure was provided by the state government during the rally by the All-Bodoland Minority Students Union (ABMSU) at Kokrajhar on July 7th, by those who were carrying the two dead bodies of Md. Narul Haque and Md. Mujibar Rahaman. The rally ended after a memorandum was submitted to the Chief Minister through the Deputy Commissioner of Kokrajhar. As the murderers were not arrested, the ABMSU leaders decided to meet the Assam Governor in Guwahati. The police authorities allegedly changed the schedules of trains from Kokrajhar to Guwahati to prevent the leaders from submitting a memorandum to the Governor on July 16, 2012. There were several warnings about the upcoming riots, but the state government failed to take note of the early warnings. The state government took no security measures and failed to take note of the early warnings. The state government took no security measures in advance. In this respect, the killing of Md. Narul Haque and Md. Mujibar Rahaman on July 6, 2012, was stated in the statement of the Union Home Minister, Sushil Kumar Shinde, while replying before the Rajya Sabha: “On July 6, Kamtapuri Liberation Organisation terrorists fired indiscriminately at Muslimpara Gaon under Gossaigaon Police Station, killing two persons belonging to the Muslim community and injuring three persons. One KLO terrorist was arrested in connection with the case registered in this regard. Though this was communicated to the Muslim people of the area, it was not believed by them, and they strongly suspected the hands of Bodo miscreants in the incidents.” In fact, the Muslim community did not believe that the KLO cadres were involved in this incident and that the state government could take immediate security measures to prevent the outbreak of violence in Assam (ACHR Report, 2012).

On July 19, 2012, some unknown miscreants on motorbikes fired indiscriminately in front of the residences of Mahibul Haque, alias Ratul, and Md. Abu Siddique, both of Magurmari village, under the Kokrajhar Police station. Both the men were the office bearers of the All Bodoland Muslim Students' Union. Mahibul Haque, alias Ratul, was a dismissed policeman, and he was well known as an anti-social element in his own local areas. He was injured a little on his leg. As a result, in response to the said incidence, the Muslim miscreants opened indiscriminate firing near Bhatipara village and attacked the house of Shri Jagadish Brahma of the village, which was 1 km away from Kokrajhar Police station, at about 9 p.m. and broke out the doors and windows, besides damaging the house. A case was registered at Kokrajhar Police Station against this incidence (Mochahari, 2012).

On July 20, four Bodo youths identified as Pradip Baro (32 years old), Dhruvajit Goyary (28 years old), Jatin Goyary (24 years old), and Jwngsar Boro (27 years old) were killed by unidentified Muslim youths in the Joypur Namapara locality in Kokrajhar. The four Bodo youths coming on two bikes saw the large gathering of Muslims and blocked the road with boulders. A police patrol van had just arrived there, and these four Bodo youths took shelter in the van of the police patrol team, but the unidentified Muslim youths pulled out all the four youths forcibly and hacked them to death in a most brutal manner (Mochahari, 2012). The violence, which started on July 20, 2012, in Kokrajhar, broke out soon in other Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD) areas of Baksa, Chirang, and Udalgiri, as well as neighbouring Dhubri and Bongaigaon districts, and claimed about 100 lives and internally displaced over 4,00,000 people (The Business Standard, 2012).

On July 21, 2012, nine people were killed and 15 others injured in attacks and counterattacks by the two communities in Kokrajhar town as the curfew was clamped and the army was deployed. At Paroura village under Fakiragram police station, one man and two women belonging to the Bodo community were shot dead by Muslim miscreants, namely Dandi Basumatary (62), Dali Basumatary (65), and Randaram Narzary (70). Sri Atul Basumatary (65) was brutally attacked and injured seriously. He was admitted to the R.N.B. civil hospital in Kokrajhar in a serious condition. The incidence happened so quickly that even the people were not returned from the cremation ground, cremating the four Bodo youths killed on the previous day, i.e., July 20, 2012 (Mochahari, 2012). On the other hand, a 60-year-old man, Shahadat Hussain, was killed and four others injured in a firing in the Duramari area under Kokrajhar police station. A 14-year-old, namely Zakir Ali, was stoned to death by unidentified persons in the Nalbari area of Kokrajhar Road. On the same date at night four cadres of the former insurgent outfit Bodo Liberation Tigers were shot dead by unidentified persons in the Joypur area under the Kokrajhar police station, and four others were injured in the Kodalduha area in an armed attack (The Indian Express, 2012).

About 36,000 people had fled their homes in Lower Assam's violence-torn Kokrajhar district and had taken shelter in 37 relief camps as the death toll in attacks and counterattacks increased to 12 since Saturday. On July 22, the violence spread to the neighbouring Chirang district, where the bodies of two people were found on Sunday. The victims in the two districts include two women and a child. According to Kokrajhar Deputy Commissioner Donald Gilfelan, 29000 people had taken shelter in 27 relief camps opened by the district administration in the Gossaigaon sub-division and 7,000 people in 10 camps in the Kokrajhar sub-division. Inspector-General of Police (Bodoland Territorial Area Districts) S. N. Singh said one person sustained a bullet wound on the leg on Sunday while the police opened fire at Sapkata to break up the mob that attacked police officers and personnel with stones, injuring a Deputy Inspector-General, personal security officers of an Additional Superintendent of Police, and the commandant of an Indian Reserve Battalion. On the other hand, Bodo village under the Gossaigaon police station, mainly Tulshibil, Aminkhata, Besorkona, and Satbil, was looted and gutted by Muslim miscreants. The

miscreants also gutted Amritpur Brahma Sevashram, a residential high school with 150 inmates 'capacity at Antaibari.

The DIG was bound for Dhubri to review and improve security measures while some people squatted on the road, demanding the immediate release of 10 people who had been picked up in connection with the violence. The police tried to control the situation, but in vain, to convince the protesters that the arrested were involved in the incidents and could not be released. The standoff had continued for two hours, and the mob started throwing stones, including the DIG and the other policemen, and damaging police vehicles. The police had returned to baton-charge first. But while the situation had gone out of control, the crowd turned more violent, and they opened fire. Later on, the person with the bullet wound was admitted to a hospital in Fakiragram. Ten companies of the Central Paramilitary Forces were deployed in sensitive areas. In fact, the Army was making its presence felt to instil confidence in the panic-stricken people. In Kokrajhar, curfew was relaxed during the day on Sunday, but it was imposed again from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. on Monday. The curfew was clamped in Chirang district after the bodies were recovered and sporadic violence occurred (The Hindu, 2012).

On July 23, 2012, the Kokrajhar violence had spread to Dhubri. The violence between Bodos and immigrant Muslims, which had started in Kokrajhar and spread to Chirang, took over the neighbouring Dhubri district. Dhubri district was central to this violence between Bodos and immigrant Muslims over land due to the migration of huge Muslims from Dhubri to Kokrajhar during the period 1990–2000, which led to the hackles of Kokrajhar residents. On that day, curfew had been clamped in Dhubri as violence erupted during the 12-hour BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Area Districts) and Dhubri district bandh called by the All-Bodoland Minority Students Union (ABMSU) and All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU). At Golokganj market, police restored to lathi charge and blank fires after a clash broke out between AAMSU activities and shop owners. At Gauripur market, AAMSU activists set ablaze 35 houses along with the office of the Bodoland People's Front. The CRPF was restored to blank fire, in which three were injured. Bandh supporters even attacked two ambulances and police vehicles at Alamganj. Two policemen were injured. At Bidyapur in Dhubri town, they torched a hostel of Bodo youths. In the meantime, in Kokrajhar, two more bodies were recovered from the Gauranga River; as a result, the death toll rose to 19. Sporadic incidents of violence were reported in different areas of the BTAD region. As a result, an indefinite curfew was clamped and shoot-at-sight orders were given by S. N. Singh, IGP of BTAD. Two ministers, Rockybul Hussain and Najrul Islam, had visited Kokrajhar and Chirang districts and held discussions with the students' bodies of both Bodo tribal and immigrant Muslim communities. Following the discussions, the ABMSU withdrew its bandh call for BTAD areas (Hindustan Times, 2012).

In Kokrajhar district, on July 23, 2012, Md. Abdul Razzak, I.C. of Bhauraguri, arrested two Bodo youths, namely Sanswring Brahma and Joysat Brahma, in the village of Koklinbari under the Gossaigaon Police station from Second Bazar, who were returning home after participating in an Army recruitment rally at Titaguri, Kokrajhar. Both of them

were handed over to Muslim miscreants and were killed brutally. The dead body of Sanswring Brahma was recovered from a well at Second Bazar, but the dead body of Josat Brahma had not been recovered, though his death was confirmed. Similarly, on the same day, the Bodo villages such as Alurbhui, Tintila, Chakrasila Pt-I, and II under the Kokrajhar police station were gutted by Muslim immigrants, and a person, namely Charan Basumatary of the village of Chakrasila Pt-I, was killed and thrown in a well. His dead body was recovered on July 28, 2012 (Mochahari, 2012).

On July 24, 2012, ABMSU, AAMSU, and Bodo Suruksha Samittee called a 24-hour Assam bandh. From that day on, the violence spread to Kokrajhar, Gossaigaon, Bongaigaon, and some parts of Dhubri districts. As a result, more than 170, 00 people fled from their homeland after fighting between indigenous Bodo tribes and Muslim settlers in Kokrajhar and Chirang districts. The central government had deployed 1500 paramilitary forces and 13 columns of the Indian Army to the affected districts. On the same day, shoot-on-sight orders and indefinite curfews were enforced in the Kokrajhar district, which led to the deaths of four people while police fired at violent crowds in the Rampur and Chaparkata areas of Kokrajhar. Then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi and asked him to do everything possible to control the violence. The Chief Minister had requested the Prime Minister for the deployment of more forces. Assam DGP Jayanta Narayan Choudhury visited the riot-affected areas of Kokrajhar on July 24, 2012. During the day, DGP J. N. Choudhury reviewed the situation. The miscreants had pelted stones and attacked the Guwahati-bound Rajdhani Express at Gossaigaon in Kokrajhar and damaged four coaches, though there was no injury. The train was turned back, halted at Kamakhyaguri station, and pulled back to New Coochbehar station in West Bengal. The rail link between the state and the rest of the country got snapped due to the spreading of violence and the lack of adequate security along the 54-kilometre stretch between Srirampur and Salakati in Kokrajhar. Thousands of passengers were stranded at six stations in West Bengal and six others in Kokrajhar district. Similarly, thousands of passengers were stranded at Guwahati railway station (The Hindu, 2012).

On July 25, 2012, the army conducted flag marches in Assam's Bodoland Territorial Areas District (BTAD) as there was no let-up in tension, with three more bodies recovered from Chirang district and five villages set on fire. Police claimed the situation had improved in Kokrajhar and Dhubri districts (The Bihar Times 2012).

On July 26, 2012, two people were killed—one at Sapkata in Kokrajhar and one in Dhubri district. As a result, shoot-at-sight orders extended to an indefinite period in Kokrajhar, and night curfews were imposed in Chirang and Dhubri districts (Swarajya Magazine 2012).

On that day, the Chief Minister finally visited Kokrajhar after a delay of so many days (which raised an important question over the reason for such laxity) and announced Rs 6 lakhs as compensation to the closet kin of those who were rendered homeless or displaced

would be provided new houses at government expense. He had also assured that peace would soon return to the violence-affected areas (Swarajya Magazine, 2012).

On the other hand, Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gagoi blamed the central government for sending the army late to the violence-hit districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, and Dhubri, where the violence claimed 45 lives and left 2.9 lakh people homeless. He had said, "We had requisitioned the army on the very first day. But it took four to five days for the forces to reach the state. He had clarified that there had not been any communication gap between the central and state governments. He said that he had informed the home ministry and the army on the very first day that violence broke out between the Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslims. He also said that if the Army were deployed since the first day, an unprecedented crisis and the loss of many lives could be avoided (Deccan Herald, 2012).

According to the ACHR report, though the state government had 27,595 armed policemen, it had failed to deploy them as early as possible to prevent riots. The state government did not even deploy central paramilitary forces existing there. Instead, it waited for the Centre to instruct West Bengal and Meghalaya to send paramilitary forces. The initial refusal of the army to be deployed directly had led to an increase in the loss of lives, displacement, and consequently the spreading of hatred in the country. On July 28, 2012, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Kokrajhar and said that he was closely working with the state government to provide a sense of security to all affected areas and ensure that they could go back to their houses in the knowledge that their lives and livelihoods were secure. Singh had said that Rs 2 lakhs would be provided to the next of kin of those who died and Rs 50,000 to the injured. He had also announced Rs 100 crores for relief and rehabilitation of the affected people in the six affected districts, Rs 100 crores as special plan assistance for development in the affected areas, and another 100 crores under the Indira Awaas Yojana. Rs 30,000 each would be given to those whose houses were completely damaged and Rs 20,000 under the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund to those whose houses were partially damaged. The prime minister had ordered an inquiry committee to be set up to look into the violence and directed the state government to provide security to the affected people so that they could go back home (Swarajya Magazine, 2012).

After a ten-day interval, fresh violence broke out in the lower parts of Assam on August 4, 2012. On August 4–5, 2012, six people were killed in Chirang district (including two bodies recovered from the Champamati River on the borders of Kokrajhar and Chirang on August 5), and two people were killed at Borlaogaon in the Bijni subdivision of Chirang district (ACHR Report, 2012).

On August 7, 2012, in the worst-affected Kokrajhar district, three people were killed and two others injured when some people opened fire on a group of people at Ranibuli village in the late night. The two injured were rushed to Guwahati Medical College and Hospital. To protest the killing of the three people who allegedly belong to the minority community, a group of 500 people blocked National Highway 31 at Beltoli on the Kokrajhar-Dhubri

border. Indefinite curfew had been re-imposed in Kokrajhar district, while round-the-clock curfew continued in neighbouring Chirang district, where one more body was recovered in the early morning from a field in Rajapara area. The Army had continued its flag marches in the three districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, and Dhubri affected by clashes between Bodo tribals and the minority community. In the meantime, a five-year-old child in the Chhatipur LP School relief camp in Chirang died allegedly due to a lack of timely medical treatment. The child had been unwell for the past five days. With this child, the number of people who had died in the relief camp increased to 14 (North East News, 2012).

On August 8, 2012, one person was killed at Jaganathjhar village in Goreswar, bordering Baksa and Udalgiri districts, and another person was killed at Mojhari Ghat in Chirang district (ACHR report 2012). On the other hand, NDFB-PTF condemned the gruesome ethnic violence in Kokrajhar, Chirang, and Dhubri districts, where hundreds of innocent people were killed and lakhs of people were displaced. They argued that the entire incident was a pre-planned attack against the sons of soil. Suspected immigrants as well as some government agents were involved in the incident (Assam Timeline 2012).

On August 13, 2012, NDFB-RD militants shot dead a Muslim labourer and injured three others from West Bengal in Chirang district, on the Indo-Bhutan border. All four were returning from Bhutan and planned to take a train to their home town of Malda in West Bengal (Assam Timeline 2012).

On August 16, 2012, nine people were seriously injured when miscreants threw acid on an autorickshaw in Gossaigaon town, Kokrajhar district. Night curfew was operational in the district from 9 p.m. on, while day curfew was relaxed. On the other hand, several people were reported to be injured when the police personnel of the Tamulpur Police Station in Baksa district fired at a mob who gathered at the Tamulpur Police Station to protest the detention of 65 people. Finally, the 65 people were detained in connection with the disappearance of Sahidul Ali from the district (Assam Timeline, 2012).

On August 17, 2012, violence rocked again in BTAD areas when a man identified as Khasem Ali was shot dead by unidentified gunmen at Salakati in Chirang district at 7:30 pm, when curfew was relaxed. Chief Minister Tarun Gagoi had appealed to all political parties to ensure a ceasefire "till the dust settles down." Amid the ongoing violence in the BTAD areas, the BDFB-progressive leaders brought up the separate Bodoland State demand to UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi (Assam Timeline, 2012).

On August 18, 2012, two people, including a child, were injured when the activists of two students' outfits threw stones at a public bus during their protest and road blockade on National Highway 31 in Dhubri district. They were holding the protest with the dead body of the leader, who was killed by unidentified gunmen outside his pharmacy on August 17th. On the other hand, one person was shot dead in Bhavanipur, Barbari, in Baksa district (ACHR Report, 2012).

On August 22, 2012, unidentified people shot two youths dead in fresh violence that broke out along the Kokrajhar-Dhubri border under the Chapar police station in Dhubri district. The deceased were identified as Zabedul Islam and Rezzak Ali, and the injured as Ismail Hussain. With this incident, the total death toll in the ongoing violence between Bodos and Muslims had risen to 87. About 30 families had left the villages in Dhubri district due to fear of post-Eid violence. Beside this, about 1,500 people had taken refuge in neighbouring West Bengal and Meghalaya states (Assam Timeline, 2012).

On August 23, 2012, one more body was recovered at Bangladoba under the Chapar police station in Dhubri district. On the other hand, on that day, police arrested BPF MLA Pradip Kumar Brahma for his role in the ethnic violence in the state, which sparked protests in Kokrajhar. As a result, BPF workers took to the street to protest despite the imposition of an indefinite curfew. Moreover, they had marched to Kokrajhar railway station and blocked the train services until 12:30 pm, forcing the railway authorities to halt trains at different stations. BPF had called an indefinite Kokrajhar bandh (Assam Timeline, 2012).

On August 25, 2012, five people were killed in fresh violence at a place between Choudhurypara and Malipara under the Bijni police station in Chirang district, and two bodies who were earlier missing were recovered from the Nalbari area of Dhemaji, and another body was recovered in Chirang district (Assam Timeline, 2012).

On August 26, 2012, security forces recovered a body with injury marks identified as Bishu Pramanik, which was found at Dangirkilla under the Bogoribari police station in Dhubri district. In another incident, unidentified miscreants near Salakati railway station in Kokrajhar district attacked two people, including a woman. The injured had been admitted to Bongaigaon Civil Hospital. AAMSU had called a 12-hour strike on August 28 to protest the continued violence in the BTAD areas. On the other hand, the state government had requested the Army intensify counter-insurgency and counterterrorism operations in the violence-hit Kokrajhar, Chirang, Bongaigaon, and Dhubri districts (Assam Timeline, 2012).

On August 27, 2012, one person was killed in Barpeta during a group clash; one person was killed and four others injured when miscreants opened fire in Pakhritola village under the Fakiragram police station in Kokrajhar district. Beside this, one more person was injured in the third incident that took place in Tupimari under the Gossaigaon police station in Kokrajhar district. A group of unidentified armed miscreants set ablaze at least 30 houses in the Pakhritola area of Fakiragram in Kokrajhar district and engaged in an exchange of fire with security forces. The miscreants had also exploded at least five grenades. An exchange of fire between security forces and miscreants was reported from three villages, namely Norjibari, Choutaki, and Bhumki, in the Salakati area of Kokrajhar district. Security Forces had picked up nine people from Bangaljhora, Dongabhita, Inglangguri, Choudhurypara, and Gumargaon in connection with the August 25th attack at Malipara camp. On the other hand, Defence Minister A. K. Anthony had ordered the MoD to take 72 hours to give its approval for the deployment of the Army in the strife-ridden areas of the state. Anthony further stated that 37 Army columns had been deployed in Dhubri,

Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Kamrup, Nalbari, Hailakandi, Cachar, Karimganj, and Sonitpur districts. ABSMU members and their supporters had defied curfew and blocked the railway track at Bijni station in Chirang district for about 6 hours, demanding the arrest of Anjali Daimari and Kampa Borgoyari, the implementation of President's Rule in the state, and the dissolution of BTC. The Chirang District unit of ABSU warned the District Administration not to harass innocent villagers in the name of searching for the culprits involved in the Malipara incident. On August 28, 2012, one person was killed in Bhumki and Chautaki areas under the Salakati police outpost in Kokrajhar district. With this death, the total number of people killed in the violence had reached 99 (ACHR Report, 2012).

**III. The Second Wave of Violence (2014):** The second wave of violence started on May 1 and 2, 2014. The BTAD areas were affected by the ethnic violence when 41 bodies were recovered in Baksa and Kokrajhar districts (Goswami, 2014). The violence started on May 1, 2014, with an attack on a local journalist, who was also the President of the Kokrajhar Press Club, whom the assailants considered a supporter of the independent candidate Hira Saraniya from Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency. However, the journalist survived the attack, although he sustained several injuries. The attack was carried out only five kilometres away from Kokrajhar headquarters. Within two hours of the incident, the first violence started in the village of Narasinghagaon under the Govardhana police station in Baksa district (Siddique 2014). NDFB-IKS militants in this attack shot three people, including two women, and injured a child. The assailants fled after committing the crime. On May 2, 2014, seven people, including two children and four women, were killed in an attack by suspected NDFB-IKS militants in Balaparajan village (I) under Goreswar police station in Kokrajhar district, under the BTAD areas of Assam. A group of heavily armed extremists had swooped down two houses in the village at night around 1 a.m. and opened indiscriminate fire, killing seven people on the spot. Two people were seriously injured. Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi called the attacks a cowardly act. Union Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde spoke to Tarun Gogoi and promised to send 10 additional companies of central paramilitary forces sought by the state government (Assam Timeline 2014). A fact-finding report on the violence in Baksa, Assam, released by the Centre for Policy Analysis blamed hate speeches by leaders for igniting up ethnic violence in the state. Beside this, non-Bodos, including Muslim migrants, who were the majority, alleged that their failure to vote for the Bodo People's Front (BPF) candidate, namely Chandan Brahma, in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections resulted in the fatal retaliation. This had been linked to remarks by BPF leader Pramila Brahma, an MLA from the ruling Bodoland Political Front party, who had made a comment after six days of polling on April 30, 2014, that the BPF would find it hard to win these Lok Sabha elections as Muslims of the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD) had not voted for its candidates (The Hindu, 2014).

On May 3, 2014, nine more bodies were recovered from a village in Baksa district in the morning, taking the toll to 32 in the violence unleashed by NDFB-IKS militants in the BTAD area of Assam. The bodies of the victims, including four children, two children, and two women, were recovered from Khagrabari village under the Salbari subdivision adjacent

to Manas National Park. Besides Chirang and parts of Dhubri districts, an indefinite curfew was imposed in Kokrajhar and Baksa districts, where 23 people were killed. The violence started when heavily armed NDFB-IKS militants entered a house and shot dead three members of a family, including two women, and injured a child of a minority community near Ananda Bazar area in Baksa district on May 1. This was followed by indiscriminate firing by the insurgents at Balapara-I village in neighbouring Kokrajhar district in the early morning of May 2, which left eight people dead and injured several others in their own houses. Beside this, in the night of May 2, 12 bullet-riddled bodies, including five women and a child, were recovered from Nanekhadabri and Nayanguri villages in Baksa district, where about 100 houses and a wooden bridge were set ablaze by the militants. The Army had staged flag marches in the violence-affected areas to instil confidence among people and bring the situation under control. Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslims had continued to flee their homes in Western Assam. The curfew was relaxed for four hours in Kokrajhar district from noon on, as no fresh attacks were reported on that day. Thirty-two people have been killed since May 1st. Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi said about 300 people from both communities had taken shelter at relief camps (Assam Timeline, 2014).

On May 4, 2014, three militants belonging to the NDFB-IKS were killed in two separate encounters with a joint team of the police, the CRPF, and the Army in Sonitpur and Udalgiri districts. Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde had said, "During the last few days, there have been wanton acts of depredation leading to the deaths of 32 persons, mainly women and children. Out of these 32 people, 31 belonged to the minority community. The objective of this group seems to be aimed at starting a full-fledged communal conflagration, reports "It is noteworthy that these acts of violence in Kokrajhar and Baksa regions of Assam started only after the group started steadily losing its cadres either by surrender or elimination during operations when they opened fire on the forces," Shinde said without naming the "group," NDFB-IKS. He added that the MHA had already deployed 43 companies of the Central Forces and was in the process of sending an additional 1,000 personnel. In addition, he noted 1,500 soldiers of the Army had been postponed in the violence-hit areas. "These numbers are not fixed and can be increased as per requirement." The state government had decided to hand over the investigation to the NIA. Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi said, "Let the NIA investigate who is involved... I want to coordinate with neighbouring Bhutan, as the militants may hide there after committing the crime. If the NIA comes, then it can be done" (Assam Timeline, 2014).

On May 5, 2014, one more body was recovered at Joypurghat in Baksa district's Narayanguri, bringing the total number of deaths to 33 in the BTAD violence. A report said that the main problem in Assam was the abundance of illegal weapons, not only among the militants but also among former militants and other anti-social elements. Inspector General of Assam Police, Law and Order, S. N. Singh, revealed that more than 28,000 persons in the state had licenced weapons, but there had been little misuse of such weapons. The problem was with illegal weapons, and though Assam Police was maintaining a drive to recover such weapons, the problem still remains. He had said that since January 2014, more than 160

illegal weapons had been seized, and significantly, about 90 percent of those were recovered from the BTAD areas. At the same time, AAMSU had demanded the immediate dissolution of the present BTC to ensure the safety and security of the non-Bodos, particularly the Muslims, living in the BTAD areas. Law and order were continuing to improve in the districts of Baksa and Kokrajhar. No violent incidents had been reported for the last 72 hours. But in the meantime, the twelve-hour strike called by the Muslim Students' Union of Assam (MUSA) to protest the killings in BTAD areas brought life to a standstill in Assam. A few violent incidents were reported during the strike in Assam. The strike had paralysed life in Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, Dibrugarh, and Cachar districts, with most shops, educational institutions, and business establishments remaining shut (Assam Timeline, 2014).

On May 6, 2014, the death toll in BTAD violence had gone up to 39, with seven more bodies being recovered from the nearest Beki River in Baksa district. So far, 32 bodies have been recovered in Baksa, while the other seven were recovered in Kokrajhar, Inspector General of Police (BTAD) LR Bishnoi said. On the other hand, a bomb blast took place in the house of Abdul Awal, a medicine trader, in Katiar-Alga village under the Fakirganj Police station in Dhubri. A source in the village said that unknown men had demanded Rs 500,000 from Awal since April 15 (Assam Timeline, 2014).

On May 8, 2014, the official death toll in the violence went up to 40 with the recovery of a boy's body from the nearest Beki River in the Moinabari area in Baksa district in BTAD areas, but there had been no fresh violence. On May 9, 2014, a body of a female child was recovered from the nearest Beki River in Baksa district, taking the death toll to 41 in BTAD violence. Eight more villagers, including seven minors, were reportedly missing.

On May 10, 2014, two more bodies of children were recovered from the nearest Beki River in Baksa district, taking the toll in violence allegedly unleashed by the BPF-supported miscreants in BTAD areas to 43 (Assam Timeline, 2014).

On May 12, 2014, a body of a 65-year-old lady identified as Mosa Banu was recovered from the nearest Beki River in Narayanguri. Earlier, two more bodies were recovered in Baksa and Barpeta districts, taking the toll to 46 in attacks in BTAD areas (Assam Timeline 2014). On May 16, 2014, two people were killed and nine were injured when security forces opened fire at a mob outside Panbari Police Outpost in the Bijni subdivision of Chirang district of BTAD. ABSU had demanded a judicial inquiry into the killings of two civilians who belonged to the Bodo community in the police firing. On the other incident, a minor boy identified as Biraj Brahma of Nongkua under Parbhajhora subdivision in Kokrajhar district was shot at and injured by suspected NDFB-IKS (Assam Timeline, 2014).

On May 17, 2014, a person named Deepak Sutradhar was killed by unidentified gunmen on the night of May 16 at Khajobari in Chirang district. Three armed militants entered his house and dragged him outside. Villagers recovered his body with his hands and legs tied.

On May 25, 2014, masked gunmen shot and injured a villager in Gaurabdaba village in the Panbari area of Chirang district during an extortion attempt. The president of the Chirang district unit of ABSU, Phanin Boro, condemned the incident and urged the people not to link the incident with a scenario in BTAD. On the other hand, AAMSU demanded seizure of illegal arms in BTAD areas, dissolution of BTAD, arrest of BTAD chief Hagrama Mohilary, deputy chief Khampa Borgayary, MLA Pramila Rani Brahma, and range officer of Bansbari range Amiya Kumar Brahma for their alleged role in the BTAD violence (Assam Timeline, 2014).

On May 27, 2014, ABSMU staged a protest outside the Raj Bhawan in the city while demanding Governor's Rule in the BTAD areas. They also demanded immediate dismissal of the BTC led by Hagrama Mohilary and a comprehensive drive out of the extremist elements from the BTAD areas. In a memorandum, the student body also called for steps to remove the camps of the youth members of the BPF and BLT and to seize all illegal arms in the BTAD areas within one month. The student body had also called for steps to set up armed police posts in all the sensitive areas in the BTAD region (Assam Timeline, 2014).

**IV. Summary of Findings from the Field:** The Bodos are one of the oldest indigenous ethnic groups in lower Assam, concentrated in the northern part of the Brahmaputra River valley. They are native settlers of Assam, and are a distinctive ethnic and linguistic group, and belong to a subgroup of the Bodo-Kacharis family. On the other hand, the Muslim population in Assam is of various types: indigenous Assamese-speaking Muslims whose forefathers came as Mughal warriors; Muslims from East Bengal brought to Assam by the British to run agricultural activities and generate more revenue in the charred areas of Brahmaputra Valley who settled in Assam before 1947; and immigrant Muslims who migrated from erstwhile East Pakistan and Bangladesh after 1971 who illegally crossed over the border and settled in many parts of Assam. Bengali-speaking Muslims who came from Bangladesh and are supposed to be illegal immigrants. To the Bodo community, the issue of illegal immigrants is a major threat to their identity formation. The problem in Bodoland started in the British colonial era and the Colonial govt. policy towards indigenous Bodo community created western parts of Assam (BTAD area) as the violence-prone area. As this issue becomes more complex day by day, the views about the violence in the BTAD areas are different according to the people of both communities.

This section analyses in detail the data obtained from the primary sample survey conducted in the district of Kokrajhar. The data is collected from two villages, namely Laxmigaon and Tulshibil, of Gossaigaon sub-division in Kokrajhar district (which is considered the Bodo heartland), during the period of June 17th to June 21st, 2022, from both communities. The sample response was collected from 40 people from both communities—20 from the Bodo community and 20 from the Muslim community. The questions are qualitative in nature, and they were administered in the form of a discussion. This method was used in order to understand the actual causes of the violence in the regions.

People belonging to the Bodo community were against uncontrolled immigration, i.e., issues of immigration. The views of the people in the Bodo community are different regarding the issues. They argued that the main cause of the violence is rooted in illegal immigration issues, unemployment, underdevelopment, and alienation of land rights. They argued that continuous migration in the region by illegal immigrants had made them a minority community, although Bodo was once the majority in these areas. The people who belong to middle-class educated families answered that the problem of unemployment is occurring due to the special privileges that are being given to the migrated people who have migrated from Bangladesh and any other parts of the country in different periods of time. The general public views the conditions differently. They argued that peace in the BTAD areas has become fragile due to the migrants. The immigrant people have been entering Assam illegally until now and demanding the permanent citizenship of India. The public sector jobs are encroached upon as there is an increase in population due to more immigrants in the BTAD areas. The other privileges of public services, such as health care facilities, water services, and special subsidy schemes, are all being enjoyed by the migrants' people. The people from the farmers section argued that they are facing the problem of cultivation due to land encroachment. The migrants' people are capturing more land and the share of agricultural land, while the land of the Bodo people is decreasing day by day. Some of the people argued that BTAD had solved land rights issues, but developmental issues like basic facilities (health care and education) still needed to be addressed. They argued that delays in the deployment of the Army had led to massive destruction and the loss of many lives. The head of the village, namely Kamal Roy, a resident of Laxmigaon in Gossaigaon sub-division, has said that two people were killed by Muslim miscreants during the 2014 violence. 52 houses were burned during the violence by the Muslim miscreants. All the villagers had to flee from their native land due to the violence, and they took shelter in the relief camps.

On the other hand, the respondents, who belonged to the Muslim community, argued that the anti-Muslim attitude of the Bodo community, the rise of Bodo militant groups, land rights issues, and language issues were the main causes of the violence in the BTAD areas. They said that Muslims are seen as outsiders in the region. They argued that no tribal could sell his or her land to any non-tribal, and no non-tribal could sell his or her land to any non-tribal in the BTC area. Beside this, the terrorist activities of the Bodo militant group are another cause of the frequent violence in the region. They said that the government had provided rehabilitation such as temporary shelter, food, and a triple, but this was inadequate for them. They also argued that violence will not spread if the Army is deployed in time in the violent-hit areas.

**V. Conclusion:** Ethnic Violence between the Bodos and Bengali-Speaking Muslims in Western Assam (2012-2014) had everlasting impact on the people of the both community. The attack and counter attack from the both community had led to the destruction of resources, loss of physical assets, loss of live and livelihood and displacement of the victims of the violence.

It is important to note that lack of timely appropriate actions from the state government and central government had contributed to the escalation of large-scale violence in the BTAD areas. There were numerous warnings about forthcoming violence but the state government of Assam failed to take note of the early warnings. If the government could take necessary step in time there will be less damage and fewer casualties. This violence had created an atmosphere of suspicion, mistrust, fear and hostility among the people of both the communities in the BTAD areas of western Assam.

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