

III. Resources

An Annotated Interview with Sashadhar Choudhury, Foreign Secretary, United Liberation Front of Asom [Assam]

by Rajeev Bhattacharyya and Nikhil Raymond Puri

Introduction

The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) was founded in the spring of 1979, guided by a desire to liberate the north-eastern state of Assam from the “neglectful” and “exploitative” tendencies of Indian control. The group’s objectives dovetailed with the nationalist fervour of the Assam Movement (1979-85), which sought to resist the perceived influx into Assam of illegal immigrants, and opposed what it considered a state-sanctioned policy of enfranchising these (mostly Bengali) “foreigners.” [1] While the Indian state succeeded in absorbing the majority of agitators into the political mainstream through the Assam Accord of 1985, ULFA persisted with a militant struggle aimed at secession from the Indian union. Towards this end, the group was able to capitalise on a critical mass of individuals dissatisfied with the terms of the Accord. A quantitative indicator of the group’s salience resides in the assortment of statistics capturing the impact of militancy in Assam. Official and unofficial data sources suggest that more than 4,000 civilians, and approximately 800 security personnel succumbed to militant activity in the state during the two decades spanning 1992 through 2011. [2] In absence of a continuous record of ULFA-specific incidents, scattered repositories place the group’s relative responsibility for this death toll between 20 and 26 percent of civilian fatalities, and between 32 and 43 percent of fatalities in the case of security personnel. [3] In absolute terms, these estimates suggest that between 800 and 1,040 civilians and between 250 and 350 security personnel died in the context of ULFA activity during this period. But ULFA’s assault has not been unilateral. Deploying the combined strength of its military, paramilitary, and police forces, the Indian state has achieved considerable success in its effort to weaken the group. According to one source, as many as 855 ULFA operatives were killed in the period from 1992 through 2001. [4] Coupled with these coercive measures, the state’s provision of financial incentives to surrendering militants has induced a great many to disengage.

In the latter part of 2009, Indian authorities relied on the good-neighbourly cooperation of Sheikh Hasina’s Awami League government in Bangladesh, which agreed to apprehend and hand over key ULFA leaders present in the country. Amongst them was the group’s foreign secretary, Sashadhar Choudhury, who was subsequently released on bail as a quid pro quo for his willingness to support peace negotiations – initiated by ULFA chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa – with the Indian state. Owing to his high rank, Sashadhar Choudhury was privy to many policies

devised by ULFA's leadership over the years, including those aimed at scouting out and motivating new recruits, maintaining discipline, and preventing disengagement. In his capacity as foreign secretary, he was responsible for establishing links with like-minded militant groups and securing patronage from foreign governments. In addition to his knowledge of the group's internal dynamics and external linkages, the intimacy and duration of his involvement afford him a unique prism through which to contemplate the full range of interaction between one's militant engagement and personal (family) life. Intent on eliciting some of his insight, the authors (Rajeev Bhattacharyya and Nikhil Raymond Puri) conducted the following interview with Sashadhar Choudhury in Guwahati on November 5, 2012.

Question: Your most recent position in ULFA has been that of foreign secretary. Can you describe the responsibilities associated with this role?

Sashadhar Choudhury: The role of foreign secretary involves linking up with other militant organisations and other countries. Linking with other organisations is not a problem. They are of the same caste. By this I mean they are insurgents so they understand the interests and motivations of other insurgent outfits even if they operate in a different region with a different ideology. We see things similarly. The second part of a foreign secretary's role involves dealing with states – with that part of the government which will take care of insurgents or talk to insurgents. Every state is self-interested. It might deal with insurgent groups, but it will do so only to further its own ends. This was evident during the Cold War era when both players [the United States and the Soviet Union] used insurgents to undermine one-another. But the [patronised] insurgent group can also use state support for its own purposes, to target its own enemy. So a foreign secretary tries to promote the group's interest by establishing contacts with other militant groups and also with governments.

Question: Can you walk us through ULFA's efforts to establish ties with other militant groups and with foreign governments?

Sashadhar Choudhury: I joined ULFA in 1985. My first foreign trip as a junior member was to Kachin Land in Myanmar. ULFA went to Kachin Land with the help of the Nagas. [5] We hoped that we could further rely on the Nagas to facilitate our transit to China since Nagas had spent time in China during the Mao Zedong era. [6] They were trained and given arms and ammunition. But the Nagas had failed to obtain Chinese support after 1971, when their links with the government of China were snapped. [7] So ULFA went to Kachin Land, intent on establishing links with the Chinese government. A meeting was held in Nagaland where various groups operating in the northeast decided they would go to China and ask for help for the whole of [India's] north-eastern region. I was not at this meeting myself, but heard from senior leaders that it was attended by [Thuingaleng] Muivah, [Isak] Chisi Swu, and [Rajkumar] Meghen who is

now in jail. [8] ULFA was also there. Most people publicly deny that any such meeting ever took place. Leaders of ULFA and Manipuri groups returned to Assam and Manipur for fundraising purposes and to reorganise their operatives. Meanwhile, Muivah and his men went to China.

Question: In which year was this?

Sashadhar Choudhury: This was in 1986. Muivah went there and failed to meet Chinese leaders. He also suffered a heavy loss of his operatives owing to the treacherous terrain. Then ULFA went there followed by Meitei groups. [9] ULFA failed to make any direct contact with China, and was forced to get indirect Chinese support through the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and the rebel groups with which it was allied. [10] We stayed with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) for two and a half years. I wore the KIA insignia and operated under their command. The understanding was that KIA would train us while ULFA would give its host anywhere between 40 to 60 percent of the arms it collected. KIA was a very big guerrilla organisation at the time. It had a 16,000-strong army.

Question: Were you also expected to fight for the Kachin cause?

Sashadhar Choudhury: Yes absolutely because we wanted arms, which we collected while fighting. Our position was: “we don’t want to know your cause, but we will be with you as an army and fight for you.” What ULFA learned from the Kachin rebels was diplomacy. While we were fighting for their army, KIA engaged in insurgent diplomacy with RAW [Research and Analysis Wing, India’s external intelligence division]. KIA told the Indian government that it would stop helping ULFA. “We will send ULFA back but you must give us arms and other logistics to fight the Burmese junta.” India agreed, so we retreated from Kachin Land. This was ULFA’s first lesson in diplomacy.

Question: The lesson being that you cannot trust anybody?

Sashadhar Choudhury: That you cannot trust anybody. But more importantly, that if others can use us for their purposes, we can also use others for ours. ULFA left Kachin Land and penetrated into Bangladesh where it connected with ISI [Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence].

Question: How did you establish these links with ISI?

Sashadhar Choudhury: I don’t know. I was not the person in charge at the time. But ULFA connected with ISI. ISI is a potent, dedicated, organisation. If they say they will do something, they will do it. In ULFA we understood that ISI was the only organisation we could rely on. I was in the first batch of ULFA militants trained by ISI. In 1991, I went to Pakistan to receive

commando training in Darra Adam Khel. I was there for six months. I also went to Khost [Afghanistan]. I also spent seven months in Rawalpindi. I was the only person [from ULFA] trained by ISI in intelligence.

Question: Did your comrades only receive weapons training?

Sashadhar Choudhury: Yes. I was the only person trained in intelligence. Intelligence has many parts. Gathering intelligence is Indian. RAW relies disproportionately on gathering intelligence. But ISI focuses equally on motivation. To them, intelligence means gathering information from you, but also motivating you. You may be a researcher, you may be from a well-do-do family, but I want to use you as a thief. ISI trains people to commit suicide without knowing their cause. Indian intelligence officials cannot obtain information even after paying people money. That is the difference. It is a different type of intelligence. When you establish a relationship, it is generally an attachment of sand and sand. You can mix sand and sand, but also separate the grains. But for ISI, a relationship is made of water and water. Once mixed, you cannot separate it. That is their philosophy.

Question: You spent time in Myanmar's Kachin camps, in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Bhutan. What were the key lessons you drew from each of these foreign experiences?

Sashadhar Choudhury: They are all very different. People in Burma are similar to us in terms of their culture and habitation. They are simple, whether they be Kachin, Mon, Pa'O, Palaung, Karen, or even Burmese. They are very simple. They live in jungles and often don't have access to roads. The main thing I learnt from the Kachin rebels was their discipline. They drank. But they obeyed their command. You cannot imagine their discipline. We only trained two ULFA batches in Kachin camps.

Question: What about Bhutan?

Sashadhar Choudhury: Bhutan is very different. It is mostly jungle. There is hardly any population. You don't really have the chance to mingle with people. You might find two or three households per village. People are not very educated and rely mostly on a barter system for their livelihood. But the Bhutanese have a good relationship with us. When we were in Bhutan, we felt like we were in Assam. We could always see our land from Bhutan and we had access to food from Assam. It was also easy to travel back and forth. We had 5,000 operatives in southern Bhutan and relied on the hospitality of local villagers. But we did not have much to learn in Bhutan. They are a peaceful people. Their love for peace was not very useful to a militant group.

Question: Did you receive any support from the Royal Bhutan Army?

Sashadhar Choudhury: We did not receive any support from Bhutanese authorities. Officials came to our camp but failed to do anything for us. [11]

Question: Tell us about the lessons you drew from your time in Bangladesh.

Sashadhar Choudhury: Bangladeshis are extremely well informed. They are also very enterprising. You can find Bangladeshis anywhere you go. In the beginning of 1991, I was living in Bangladesh. We ran guns through Bangladesh. One day my Bangladeshi cook put too much chilli in our meat so I rebuked him. He told me not to complain. I asked him what he'd do. He said he was going to Singapore as soon as his passport arrived so my complaints were useless. In Assam you can give a person a passport, money, and a university degree and a trip to Singapore might still be impossible. Bangladeshis are different. If you give them money, they will smuggle guns. It is very tough to find people who will smuggle guns. A gun weighs 5 kilos. If a person smuggles a gun he might get 10,000 rupees (US\$ 180). But if he smuggles 5 kilos of gold he will get closer to 2,00,000 rupees (US\$ 3700). Why would someone smuggle guns? People would much rather smuggle heroin. But Bangladeshis will smuggle guns. Bangladeshis will take risks that nobody else will. They are risk-takers.

Question: And what did you learn in Pakistan?

Sashadhar Choudhury: Their determination to fight India. They hold on to principles.

Question: As the leader of a militant group, what measures do you take to motivate recruits, and to prevent disengagement?

Sashadhar Choudhury: It is very difficult. We tried but we failed. You may succeed in recruiting one member. He may join due to patriotism, or frustration, or anything else. He might land up in a base camp in Bhutan. We will expose him to political thoughts, we will give him history lessons. We will also give him military training. This is all easy. It is like a picnic. But sooner or later he will be sent for an operation. When he gets involved in operations he will realise that he has to keep doing this until his death and that he will not get much for it. You are sent on operations with two days worth of rations, bullets and a gun. It is not easy. In Assam, if you get into politics instead, you will get a secretary, you will get promotions, and might eventually make it to Parliament. In insurgency, promotions are value-less. If you are promoted to a commander you have to go in front. That means ULFA will use me until death. Then I will be discarded. There is little benefit. The problem in insurgency is that there is a big gap between

leaders and operatives. There are five or six leaders. They have been there more or less since the beginning. But when you join an insurgency, your fight can result only in surrender or death. [12]

When junior members descend from camps and go home, they often get involved in love affairs. Marrying in a militant camp is not that easy. [13] [Intent on staying home] they will then try to contact the government or police. The government will provide them money and they will surrender. [14]

Question: Apart from monetary incentives, what other government measures have prompted surrender of ULFA members?

Sashadhar Choudhury: The police have killed ULFA leaders' family members. They killed my brother. They killed our publicity secretary's entire family. [15] They killed Paresh Baruah's brothers. [16] They started targeting the lower level operatives as well. So the lower level operatives will say "I should surrender so they do not kill my relatives." The government has used every weapon against us.

Question: Were there any measures that ULFA's leadership took to reduce the rate of disengagement?

Sashadhar Choudhury: No, we eventually concluded that it is not our burden. If you want to surrender, go ahead. It is impossible to motivate people to stay. When a person is young and energetic, he thinks of sacrificing for two causes: 1) for his offspring, and 2) for his motherland. And when they become old, they forget about the motherland. They will only remain engaged for money. This is how it is everywhere. But you cannot say all people have surrendered. Some people are there. We have been there for 27 years.

Question: You mention the energy associated with youth. What role does age play in the decision to disengage, and when does a militant become too old?

Sashadhar Choudhury: You cannot do anything once you get older. What will I do if I go back to the jungle? You cannot endure hardship. You cannot fight. Guerrilla service is finished at the age of 30. After the age of 30 you cannot do anything. [17]

Question: So surrender is almost inevitable after the age of 30?

Sashadhar Choudhury: Yes. It is a life of hardship.

Question: How does ULFA cope with the fact that the average militant will disengage due to age or fatigue?

Sashadhar Choudhury: We have to keep recruiting. Somebody will go and somebody will come. It is an ongoing process.

Question: We would like to ask you some questions about the manner in which your experience as a militant impacted, and was impacted by, your family.

Sashadhar Choudhury: I have completely snapped my relationship with my own family – with my father and mother. It is very difficult to maintain relations.

Question: Why did you do that?

Sashadhar Choudhury: You cannot maintain a relationship. Intelligence officials are always there. If it is known that your relatives are communicating with you, then they might be killed. It is very dangerous.

Question: So it is in the interest of your relatives to stop communicating with them when you become actively involved in militancy?

Sashadhar Choudhury: How is it possible to communicate? If you make a telephone call, it is tapped. The next day they [your relatives] will be picked up and given a good beating. If you never interact with your relatives, the cops will not bother them.

Question: Can you talk about the specific difficulties your relatives endured during your time as a militant?

Sashadhar Choudhury: Yes. My father died of that. He was a teacher. Every night they would come and slap him. “Have you communicated with your son? Do you have any contact with him?” Bogus questions. There was a former DGP [Director General of Police] named Srivastava. He is currently a security advisor in Guwahati. He killed my brother. My brother was innocent. He was a government employee. Many Assamese people have been killed in secret killings. They have killed all ULFA leaders’ loved ones.

Question: It is understandable that you should stop communicating with your parents for practical reasons. But did you also break your emotional ties with them?

Sashadhar Choudhury: No. Nobody does that. Emotionally you cannot snap ties with your father and mother. It is not possible. But when you become a guerrilla, things are very different. When you become a militant, it is a very different world.

Question: Did you ever experience conflict between your desire to contact your parents and your inability to do so?

Sashadhar Choudhury: I am telling you, guerrillas are born. You cannot make a guerrilla. Our heart is very different from yours. We are very different people. I have a daughter. I have a wife. If someone comes and tells me “your daughter has died,” it will be very different than if someone tells an ordinary person the same. People die. For me, that is life. I love her. But things are meant to be. I think we are born to curb the emotion.

Question: This is your perspective. But how did your parents feel? How did your militancy impact them emotionally?

Sashadhar Choudhury: No, they are ordinary people. When I saw them in jail, they would become extremely emotional. I know that they always cried when they talked to others about me.

Question: So you have the heart of a guerrilla but your parents were very normal people. They reacted emotionally to your circumstances,

Sashadhar Choudhury: Yes. It is not possible for them to respond the same way.

Question: When did you get married? After you joined ULFA?

Sashadhar Choudhury: I got married in 1997. I joined ULFA in 1985.

Question: And how did your marriage influence your ability to participate in militancy?

Sashadhar Choudhury: It had no impact because my wife was also a member. I married within the organisation.

Question: Would it have been possible for you to marry someone outside the organisation?

Sashadhar Choudhury: It is difficult. Why will she give you to die? Why will she give you to take risks? When you go abroad with false documents there is a risk of long-term imprisonment if you get caught. It is difficult. It might be possible. I’m sure you can find cases where it happens. But for me it would be very difficult.

Question: You mentioned you have a daughter. What would you think if your child pursued the same route as you did?

Sashadhar Choudhury: No, she will not pursue this route. She has been born and brought up around the gun. She knows that her father is a guerrilla. He killed so many people. He has done so much fighting, and she knows it is a bad thing. But she never expresses it. They [children of militants] have seen and heard things you cannot imagine. So her condition is very different. No guerrilla's family members want to become guerrillas because they know the hardship involved.

Question: You joined ULFA as a young man. Individuals change with time. How has your ideology evolved over these years? Has there been a shift?

Sashadhar Choudhury: I am a very different person. I am a spiritual man. You may expect otherwise. I get up at 4am and meditate. All these years I have been doing this. I am 50 years old now. From 4am to 5am I meditate. Then I do yoga for another hour. Then I read. Then it is ULFA business after breakfast. I do ULFA business the whole day. Then after 4pm I exercise again. I lift weights for an hour. Then I rest for one hour until 6pm. After 6pm I give time to family. I play with my daughter or talk to my wife. Let me tell you one thing. It is not possible for you to understand peace, because you are in peace. You may understand anxiety and tension. But you cannot understand peace. I have spent 27 years in violence. Killing, violence, insecurity, anxiety – that is all I have seen these years. I will probably live another 20, maybe 30 years. All I want for these years is peace. Nothing is more precious for me now. If and when there is a settlement with the Government of India, I will not talk to any scribe. I don't want to be a powerful man. I want to live a low-profile life. I don't want anything else. I will even discard my cell phone.

Question: You want that now, possibly due to fatigue.

Sashadhar Choudhury: No, from the very beginning. Of course when I joined the movement as a youngster, things were very different. But soon after I joined ULFA I understood peace. People always ask "why don't you write an autobiography?" But I don't want to. When you go for this, it will again smash, again violate your peace. You have to withdraw completely.

Question: Would you still support violent means if, say, the next generation of Assam's youth chooses to use violence to achieve its objectives?

Sashadhar Choudhury: If somebody comes to me and says "I want to be a guerrilla," I have no option but to say "you can do it, but these are the pros and these are the cons. It's your own choice, but these are the conditions you have to meet." And I don't believe an ordinary person

can easily meet these criteria. You'll spend five or six years doing it and then bounce out. It is very difficult.

Question: So what is it about you, about Paresh Baruah, about Arabinda Rajkhowa that allows you to endure these difficulties for so long?

Sashadhar Choudhury: I cannot speak for others. Within ULFA I have no such personal relationship with others that I can speak for them. Except for Raju Baruah. [18] He was my friend. He was a commander. I don't ask others what they are doing. It is organisational business only. It is purely professional.

Question: So there are no friendships within ULFA?

Sashadhar Choudhury: No. It is like the relationship with your teacher. Emotion will not work. Inside a guerrilla movement there is no option to make such an emotional friendship. Nobody wants to interfere in your personal life.

Question: What allowed you to stay involved for so long?

Sashadhar Choudhury: I am a very determined person. I will always do what I say. If I say I will do so and so, I will do it. That is a personal characteristic. That is all. I have stated to ULFA that I will be with ULFA. If required, I will go to the jungle again. I have no problem. Then I will not search for peace.

Question: How would you assess your career with ULFA, keeping the group's objectives in mind?

Sashadhar Choudhury: In one way I can say "no we have not succeeded, everything has gone in vain." On the other hand, we have tested all means permitted to us in this life. We have tried everything. We have done as much as men can do. So we believe that we have succeeded as human beings in trying our best. That is sufficient. I am sure the group's objectives will not be fulfilled in my lifetime because the world has changed. When we went there in 1985 the world was different. It was a bipolar world. India's condition was different. Assam was different. Demographic conditions were different. The social structure was different. Everything was different.

Question: What are the qualities the leader of a militant group must possess?

Sashadhar Choudhury: First, you cannot be a hypocrite. Let me give you a hypothetical example. I am a commander with ten people under my command. We have to take shelter in different homes. I hear that one of my boys has molested a girl. Usually, for molestation ULFA's policy is that the person will be demoted one rank. If he is a private, then he will be caned instead since there is no room for demotion. But if he has seen you doing similar things, then it is difficult to punish and discipline. He will get a group of his friends together and say "I have also seen the commander molesting someone." And these are all gun-toting elements. When you sleep at night he might kill you. So who will take the risk? It is a problem. In the army, it is impossible for a soldier to kill a captain. After all, where will the soldier go? But in ULFA's case, if a junior member kills a senior leader, he can surrender and get remuneration from the government. It is a problem. When a crime is committed, you have to punish. But you also have to take care of yourself. So sometimes you have to ignore wrongdoing by your juniors. It is easy to be killed in a jungle camp. Second, a good leader should never backbite. All guerrilla history has one vice – backbiting. That means when you fail then somebody will say, "we failed because of him or him." Guerrillas only build up egos. Guerrillas never build up self-esteem. Self-esteem and ego are very different.

Question: When did you first kill someone? And how did you reconcile yourself with the act?

Sashadhar Choudhury: It is very difficult. The hardest feeling in the world is in the wake of murder. When you kill somebody because of his anger or something he has done, you can justify it. But it is more difficult when you follow orders, which can't be questioned. You don't know the person or why he had to die. I was 23 years old the first time. It was very difficult. I remember every person I have killed, when I have killed him, how I have killed him, even the appearance of his face. If I was an artist, I could draw each one of them. When I meditate I can travel from one incident to the other. But I don't know the names.

Question: Now, a question we meant to ask in the beginning. How much of your initial involvement was motivated by your cause, and how much was for want of adventure?

Sashadhar Choudhury: We were motivated. We came from the Assam movement. The majority of the movement at the time was highly motivated. We did everything on our own. But of course, without adventurism, it isn't possible to be a guerrilla.

Question: So are you now equally motivated but low on adventurism?

Sashadhar Choudhury: Adventurism is still with me, but not to kill people. Now it is to go travel with valid documents. There are so many places to explore.

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Notes

[1] For a comprehensive overview of the determinants and consequences of the Assam Movement, and detailed analysis of the centre's relationship to India's north-eastern periphery, see Sanjib Baruah. 1999. *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; and H.K. Bhattacharyya. 2001. *The Silent Invasion: Assam Versus Infiltration*. Delhi: Spectrum Publications.

[2] As per data sheets compiled by South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), militant groups in Assam killed 2,465 civilians and 613 security personnel in the ten-year period from 1992 through 2001. India's Ministry of Home Affairs reports the number of fatalities for the following decade at 1,661 civilians and 187 security personnel. SATP data sheets are available on the web at: <http://www.satp.org>. SATP also provides brief overviews of militant groups active in South Asia. The Ministry of Home Affairs reports are available on the web at: <http://www.mha.nic.in>.

[3] The lower limits of these ranges are based on data obtained from India's Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). According to MHA reports, ULFA was responsible for 43 of the 207 civilian and 11 of the 34 security personnel deaths inflicted by militancy in Assam during the years 2009 and 2010. The upper limits of the ranges derive from data compiled by South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP). According to SATP, ULFA was responsible for 648 of 2,465 civilian and 269 of 613 security personnel fatalities inflicted by militancy in Assam during the decade from 1992 through 2001.

[4] Obtained from South Asia Terrorism Portal's Data Sheets.

[5] Other ULFA members interviewed by Bhattacharyya have suggested that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur facilitated ULFA's transit to Kachin camps. E.g. Kiran Barua (senior functionary, ULFA), interviewed by Rajeev Bhattacharyya in Guwahati on May 11, 2011; and Lohit Deuri (staff officer, ULFA), interviewed by Rajeev Bhattacharyya in Guwahati on March 30, 2010.

[6] Naga outfits have been at war with the Indian state since 1947, towards secession of the north-eastern state of Nagaland from the Indian union. Naga secessionist demands were initially represented by the Naga National Council (NNC). Factional splits in 1980 prompted the formation of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). Another split in 1988 gave way to two factions: NSCN-IM led by Isak Chisi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah, and NSCN-K led by Khole Konyak and S.S. Khaplang. For more detail on the characteristics of Naga insurgency, see Rajeev Bhattacharyya (2013). *Lens and the Guerrilla: Insurgency in India's Northeast*. New Delhi: Manas Publications, pp. 81-89, 100-119, 184-187; as well as M. Horam (1988). *Naga Insurgency: The Last 30 Years*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications.

[7] According to accounts provided by Naga insurgents, training facilities in China's south-western Yunnan Province existed until the late 1970s. They were dismantled after India's then foreign minister Atal Behari Vajpayee visited Beijing and urged the Chinese leadership to cease support for rebels from Northeast India. Input provided by Lhouvitsou (functionary, Naga National Council), interviewed by Rajeev Bhattacharyya in Kohima on June 23, 2009.

[8] As mentioned in note [6], Chisi Swu and Muivah were the founders of the Naga group NSCN-IM. Rajkumar Meghen is the chairman of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), a militant group based in the Indian state of Manipur with a socialist ideology and secessionist goals. For a brief overview of UNLF available on the web, see South Asia Terrorism Portal (<http://www.satp.org>)

[9] Meitei is the name of the Hindu community inhabiting Imphal Valley in Manipur.

[10] For a closer examination of the Communist Party of Burma, and its relationship to the Kachin Independence Army and other rebel groups in Myanmar, see Bertil Lintner

(1990). *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Burma*. Cornell, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications; and Shelby Tucker (2000). *Among Insurgents: Walking Through Burma*. London: The Radcliffe Press.

[11] This response conflicts with information provided by Lohit Deuri, a former ULFA staff officer, suggesting that ULFA did in fact receive support from Bhutanese army officials. Lohit Deuri, interviewed by Rajeev Bhattacharyya on March 30, 2010.

[12] The interviewee's response suggests that ULFA's organisation allows little opportunity for effective role migration. Junior operatives intent on securing leadership positions will most likely meet disappointment. For a discussion of role migration and role qualities, and their implications for disengagement, see John Horgan (2009). *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements*. London: Routledge, p. 10.

[13] In this particular scenario, it is unclear whether the desire to establish a family prompted physical disengagement, or whether psychological disengagement encouraged the operative in question to search for a good reason to physically disengage – in this case by establishing a relationship. For a more elaborate distinction between psychological and physical disengagement, see John Horgan, op. cit., pp. 31-36. Bjorgo views the desire to establish a family life as a potent (pull) factor underlying many instances of disengagement. See, Tore Bjorgo (1999). Processes of disengagement from violent groups of the extreme right, in (Eds.) Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan. *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*. London: Routledge, pp. 30-48.

[14] The provision of financial incentives for surrendering militants is organised through two schemes funded by the central government: Scheme for Surrender-Cum-Rehabilitation of Militants in the North-East: Government of Assam (1998), and Revised Scheme for Surrender-Cum Rehabilitation of Militants in the North-East (2005). Incentives for surrendering militants include: a grant of 150,000 rupees (US\$ 2,750), a monthly stipend of 2000 rupees (US\$ 40) for a period of 36 months, and lodging facilities in a rehabilitation camp. These schemes have been fairly successful, despite frequent complaints by surrendered militants of delays in delivery of the promised incentives.

[15] The interviewee refers here to ULFA's publicity secretary, Mithinga Daimary, who was arrested and handed over to Indian authorities by the Royal Bhutan Army in 2003. He has subsequently supported chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa's ongoing peace initiative with the Indian government.

[16] Paresh Baruah is currently the chief of staff of ULFA's anti-talks faction.

[17] This response speaks to the element of fatigue, to the phenomenon of "becoming burned out," regarded by J. Horgan as a contributing factor to psychological disengagement. See, John Horgan (1999). Individual disengagement: a psychological analysis, in (Eds.) Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan. *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*. London: Routledge, pp. 17-29. Bjorgo views fatigue as a push factor, amongst the circumstances making it difficult to remain actively involved in militancy. See, Tore Bjorgo (1999). Processes of disengagement from violent groups of the extreme right, in (Eds.) Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan. *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*. London: Routledge, pp. 30-48.

[18] Raju Baruah was ULFA's military spokesperson. He is a participant in the ongoing peace talks with the Indian government.
